

Identity at work: Developing and using an integrated approach to explore the role of identity (both as a struggle and as a resource) in a knowledge intensive organizational setting

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Abstract

This research explores the role of identity within a knowledge intensive organizational setting in which frequent change, ambiguous work, autonomous work practices, and pervasive client relationships mean that organizational members face many complex challenges in their day-to-day work life.

On the basis of a longitudinal, multi-level, intra- and inter-organizational study of a group of people within a regional marketing agency, an integrated approach is proposed and developed as a way to explore and emphasise the complex role of identity, as both a resource and a struggle, in this organizational setting. The approach is generated from iterative cycling between data and existing theory in which the concepts of social identities and identity work are drawn together as a way to provide insight into the role of identity within the research setting.

The research participants are seen to engage in identity work in order to create, change, protect and switch between multiple work-related social identities. It is argued that this is a crucial part of agency work, which agency employees work hard to achieve. It is also argued that they use this 'fluid framework' of identity as way of dealing with some of the challenges of their everyday work. The research itself is underpinned by a methodology guided by symbolic interactionism. The conceptualisation of identity as an ongoing process with occasional pauses is rooted in the Meadian concept of the 'I' and the 'me'.

The contribution of this study to the developing field of identity and organizations is in the building of a conceptual bridge between those whose main concern is with the dynamics of identity creation and those whose main concern is with the product or outcome of identity processes. A practical contribution is also made to further understanding identity at work through the insights gained within this research setting.

Chapter One: Introduction

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

Interest in knowledge intensive organizations is considerable (Alvesson, 2000). Understanding the issues associated with these kinds of organizations is becoming increasingly important ‘as the expansion of the service sector, the rise and expansion of so-called knowledge work, [and] the shift towards a consumer economy’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 150) sees the emergence of new organizational forms and new organizational practices (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004). These kinds of organizations are often embedded in complex networks, where organizational boundaries are permeable (Swart & Kinnie, 2003), blur or become fuzzy (Harrison & St. John, 1996), and realities are increasingly decentred, ambiguous, and open to negotiation (Grimshaw, Marchington, Rubery & Willmott, 2005). The characteristics of these kinds of organizations create a multitude of challenges for those working within them, such as managing pervasive client relations, doing and managing subjective and ambiguous work, and coping with frequent change. In terms of understanding these kinds of organizations, with particular reference to how the individuals within them make sense of themselves, those with whom they interact, and their work, the concept of identity is receiving a great deal of interest in organizational research, with good reason.

People who work within knowledge intensive organizations have to work hard to navigate and make sense of their complicated organizational worlds. They also have to work at defining and maintaining their work-related identities (Alvesson, 1994; Karreman & Alvesson, 2001; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), which are problematic, threatened by ambiguous work, rapid change, and complex intra- and inter-organizational relationships.

In these kinds of organizational settings many work-related identities come into play within the context of every day work. One way to make sense of these is in terms of social identities, or the groups with which individuals identify (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Work-related social identities include, for example,

team, department, function and profession, workplace and organization. It has been argued that in complex organizations, 'the prevalence of social categories suggests that social identities are likely to represent a significant component of individuals' organizationally situated self-definition' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The social identity view is that the individual cognitively segments and orders his or her social environment, and systematically defines or locates him or herself within it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In this sense, identity at work is viewed as a resource or a platform from which to make sense (Colville, Weick, and Waterman, 1999). It must be borne in mind that from a symbolic interactionist viewpoint it is the symbolically created meanings behind these social identifications that are of interest, and thus they are not taken for granted as uniform social categories, but it is pointed out that they 'may become so deep-rooted that they are seriously difficult to change' (Beech & Huxham, 1995: 141).

The variety of ways that individuals may be deployed to do work, such as outsourcing, joint ventures, partnership working, secondments, and collaborations can mean there is less likely to be a straightforward employer-employee relationship, which may impact upon the identification processes with the employing organization (Cooke, Hebson, Carroll, 2005). Moreover, the identity processes themselves may be complex and problematic as identifications may transcend organizational boundaries. (Beech & Huxham, 2003). Exploring the role of identity in these kinds of organizations in social identity terms alone for the purposes of this research is not sufficient, as it can tend to underemphasize the fluid, changing, and problematic nature of identity.

Much contemporary literature within the field of identity and organizations turns to an alternative approach in order to understand and explore the complexities and subtleties of the role of identity in knowledge intensive organizations. This alternative approach emphasizes the importance of language (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a), narrative (Brown, 2006), and discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This approach highlights that not only are individuals grappling with the issues and challenges arising from the complexity of their everyday work, they are also grappling with the related challenges of shaping, creating, managing, maintaining and changing their work-related identities across social boundaries (Beech & Huxham, 2003). The

knowledge intensive, frequently changing nature of contemporary organizations, in which employees often have to act based on their own understanding, (Alvesson, 2001) is one of the ‘constant strains’ which can ‘serve to heighten awareness of the constructed quality of self-identity and compel more concentrated identity work’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1165). In this sense, identity at work is viewed as a struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

This research explores the role of identity within the day-to-day work context of a knowledge intensive, rapidly changing, complex organizational setting. It is proposed that when undertaking such a study, because of the complexities and dynamic nature of the organizational setting, it is useful to apply a discursive or narrative approach to the study of identity (Brown, 2006). It is also suggested, however, that when paying attention to how the people working within these organizations make sense of and identify themselves and others, by adhering to and rehearsing well defined team, departmental and workplace classifications, for example, a ‘more traditional approach to identity studies’ (Beech, 2006: 44) might be useful. This thesis therefore proposes an integrated approach that draws ideas from the two different theoretical lenses, which are defined as discursive/alternative and socio-psychological/traditional respectively. This type of approach is perceptible within other studies in this area, for example, Beech and Huxham (2003) sought to ‘encapsulate the tension between the essentialist and constructionist standpoints’ (2003: 127). They did this by choosing to maintain both:

‘arguing that identities can be either relatively stable, “crystalline,” or relatively dynamic, “fluid,” at different times or at the same time from the perspective of different participants’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 127)

As Beech and Huxham (2003) highlight, each of these approaches emphasises different aspects of identity. Is it fixed or mutable? Should it be seen as an outcome or a process? It is proposed that to fully explore the complex nature of the role of identity within a knowledge intensive organizational setting, an integrated approach can be used. This approach emphasizes the importance of both aspects of identity. This can be beneficial when attempting to unpack and further understand the complexity of identity in day-to-day work in the type of organizations of interest.

As a way to strike a balance between the two approaches considered a methodology guided by symbolic interactionist thought is adopted (Blumer, 1969). A more detailed exploration of the implications of this methodology is provided in chapter three, however, it is briefly clarified here as follows. Symbolic interactionism holds that reality is created through symbolic interaction thus for the purposes of this research language, discourse, and narrative are viewed as important symbolic resources in identity creation rather than being privileged as the means of identity creation.

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the organization and identity literature, by building a bridge between the two approaches. As recently pointed out by Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer:

‘an integrated approach to identity research needs to bridge distinctions between social, organizational, and corporate domains – and associated concerns with process, patterning and product – in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity-in-action’ (2007: S11).

Cornelissen et al. (2007) refer to bridging a gap between social, corporate and organizational identity research, however, the developing field of identity and organizations creates the need to explore many potential bridges between different identity domains. The thesis presented here is one such attempt to build a bridge between those whose main concern is with the dynamics of identity creation and those whose main concern is with the product or outcome of identity processes. In other words, the ‘trends away from monolithic to multiple identities and from fixed or essentialist views on identity to discursive and constructed approaches’, (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1164) are recognised as vital for moving toward greater understanding of identity at work, however, it is suggested that a bridge is needed between the processes of multiple identity creation and the temporary outcomes, or pauses in the process. It is argued, and demonstrated with data from the research, that such a bridge can be created and by so doing, certain gaps in current understanding relating to identity in practice and gaining a comprehensive understanding of identity-in-action (Cornelissen et al., 2007) can be addressed. These gaps are outlined in section 4.1 below and discussed in depth in chapter two.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to frame the thesis by introducing the key elements of the research; outlining the aims; and highlighting the contributions to ‘the emerging field of ‘identity and organization’’ (Cornelissen et al., 2007: S2). The research itself pays specific attention to how the role of identity at work is understood by those who study it, and how it is experienced as part of everyday work life for a team of people who work for a marketing agency.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

The section following this introductory one describes the field to which this thesis has a contribution to make and outlines the main aims of the research. This section covers the importance of studying the ‘everyday’ context of work-organizations and the centrality of identity at work. It also extends the argument made in the introductory section for the need to develop an integrated approach to the study of identity at work. Section three introduces the general context and the relevance of the case for the study at hand. Section four offers a chapter-by-chapter synopsis, and section five summarises the aims of the research.

SECTION TWO – AIMS AND CONTRIBUTION

2.1 People at work

Seeking to understand individual and small group experience of work is vital. With organizational life becoming increasingly complex and fragmented (Grimshaw et al., 2005), global competition increasing, and many changes affecting the experience of everyday work life, it has never been more important to do research that can further understanding of the complexities and ambiguities present in everyday work life. The underlying aim of this research, therefore, is to undertake a study that pays attention to how individuals make sense of themselves, those with whom they interact, and their work, in increasingly complex organizational contexts. This is done by paying attention to day-to-day work activities, asking people about their day-to-day work, and exploring the ‘more everyday and less noticeable processes’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 134) of the research setting.

In a study that is concerned with how individuals make sense of themselves, those around them, and their organizational world, it is not surprising that identity should emerge as a central theme. Given that ‘the basic ‘thing’ to be defined in any situation is the person himself’ (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 59), who or what something ‘is’, will therefore be in relation to the person doing the defining. This person, doing the defining, defines, and is defined by their identity. This argument is captured eloquently in the phrase ‘sensemaking is grounded in identity construction’ (Weick, 1995a), a notion that was highlighted by Barney, Bunderson, Foreman, Gustafson, Huff, Martins, Reger, Sarason and Stimpert (1998) as part of their identity conversation in the sense that ‘ you cannot make sense without some sense of who you are’ (1998: 111).

2.2 Identity at work

It is recognised in many fields of organizational research that understanding identity in work contexts is important. It is useful to consider the concept of identity itself, and its importance in understanding human behaviour, when answering the question, why study identity at work? Gioia put forward that:

‘Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion. That is a strong statement, but consider some of the key questions that we might use to assess the reach of the concept: What other issue is quite so important than answering the nebulous question, Who am I? What other concern is quite so captivating than dealing with the ongoing, lifelong project of assessing identity and figuring out how one relates to others and the surrounding world? What other question so influences understanding and action so heavily (if perhaps out of conscious awareness)? I can think of no other concept that is so central to the human experience, or one that infuses so many interpretations and actions, than the notion of identity’ (Gioia, 1998: 17).

Gioia’s point is that the study of identity is important in understanding human behaviour because it influences all human behaviour. Implicit in this statement is that

identity is central to understanding *and* action. It is an ongoing project *and* a point of departure from which people make sense of themselves and others (Weick, 1979; 1995a). It is crucial within the interactions between people. This infusion of interpretations is vital to understanding the notion of identity. To understand this infusion more deeply, within the context of knowledge organizations, this thesis teases apart the infusion, by drawing from two different literatures; those that tend to emphasize the view that identity is a socially constructed framework, and those who see it as continuously emerging and discursively constituted. It is suggested that where there is some common ground between the two an integrated approach can be developed. By developing an integrated approach, as this thesis aims to do, a more comprehensive, more insightful, more detailed understanding of the role of identity in practice can be achieved.

Identity and organizations has recently been acknowledged as an emerging field in its own right (Cornelissen et al., 2007). This field incorporates a range of topics at multiple levels, such as the identity of organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Gioia, 1998; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000), the identity of groups within organizational settings (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, Hogg & Terry, 2000; Bartunek, 2003), and the processes of identity creation (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, Humphreys & Brown, 2002a; Beech & Huxham, 2003). Within this field it has been identified that there is a lack of multi-level (Foreman & Whetten, 2002;), cross-organizational (Beech & Huxham, 2003), empirically supported research (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Corley, 2004), despite the recognised usefulness and importance of identity as a multi-level construct (Albert, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

One of the key aims of this research is to make a contribution to this field by undertaking a longitudinal, multi-level, cross-boundary, empirical study, within a particular organizational setting. An in-depth study of a single case is well placed to further the understanding of complexities of the role of identity at work by retaining a quality of wholeness to the picture presented. In this way the picture presented aims to demonstrate how the role of identity at work is experienced by the research participants as both an ongoing struggle and a useful resource.

2.3 Identity as resource, identity as struggle

In order to tease apart and unpack the complex nature of the role of identity, shape and focus are achieved by framing it as a 'struggle' and a 'resource' for individuals dealing with the challenges associated with doing knowledge intensive, subjective, and sometimes ambiguous work. This way of framing identity lines up under the two approaches mentioned, in that discursive perspectives are more likely to emphasise the identity as a struggle metaphor, whereas socio-psychological perspectives are more likely to emphasis identity as a resource. I will explain this point a little further.

In the context of this research, the term 'identity at work' means more than identity situated within work settings. The term 'identity at work' also relates to the idea that identity can be seen as resource, or a guide for making sense (Colville, Weick & Waterman, 1999). In this respect identity is seen as aiding the individual in dealing with the challenges involved in carrying out their day-to-day work. Existing studies such as Dutton and Dukerich (1991) and Gioia and Thomas (1996) conceive identity in a similar way at the organizational level and senior management level. In these two studies interpretation of organizational identity is seen to influence the stance taken on a particular issue for the New York and New Jersey Port Authority (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), and the strategic decision making of senior managers of a University (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). The study in hand looks more closely at the individual and small group level and shows how identity is actively used by the research participants in constructing and dealing with some of their day-to-day work challenges. An aim of this research, therefore, is to explore the role of identity as a resource in a knowledge intensive organizational setting.

Of equal importance to this research is the aim of exploring the role of identity as an ongoing struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), or continuously emerging. These authors define identity as a struggle in terms of the processes engaged in order to respond to the question 'who am I?' The metaphor of identity as struggle draws attention to the notion that tensions and contradictions between multiple identities abound, hence 'the constant struggle bringing about temporary views of the self, where certain identity versions dominate over others, depending on the context' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1183). This view emphasizes the complex picture of

identity at work arising from the problematic, negotiated, symbolically created, narrated and inter-related nature of individual and collective identity (Humphreys & Brown, 2002b).

If the question of identity as a resource revolves around the *use and usefulness* of identity at work, then the question of identity as a struggle revolves around the *creating and managing* of identity in these contexts. These two aspects of identity are not usually considered in juxtaposition when exploring identity at work, with the notable exception of Beech and Huxham (2003), and to some extent, Karreman and Alvesson (2004). This may be because these two aspects of identity are the central concerns of two separate theoretical views points, or approaches to the study of identity at work – these being socio-psychological and discursive approaches respectively. A central aim of this research is to develop an approach that provides a partial integration of these two perspectives at the point where some of their theoretical and methodological assumptions overlap and conceptual bridges can be contemplated. An integrated approach has the scope to enable those who are exploring the role of identity in complex organizational settings to take a balanced and comprehensive view of identity at work by simultaneously considering the role of identity as a resource and as a struggle, and to notice how it is both created and used by organizational members in the context of day-to-day work. This kind of approach has the scope to sensitise the researcher to the possibility that both the process and the outcome of identity matter to organization members who interpret, construct, and experience the challenges of working in knowledge intensive organizations.

This thesis develops an integrated approach by suggesting, and demonstrating that the concepts of ‘social identities’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and ‘identity work’ (Alvesson, 1994, 2000; Lilley 1997, Thomas & Linstead 2002, Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004; Beech, 2006) are both relevant to the study of identity, and can be usefully seen as connected to one another in a cyclical pattern of being-becoming-being in which ‘being’ relates to the deep rooted, usually well-defined meanings of work-related social identities and ‘becoming’ relates to the identity work processes or struggles to define oneself in ambiguous settings. This pattern might also be described as creating-creation-

creating, in which the temporary pauses of the identity creating, shaping, maintaining processes are seen as a creation, which influences a new cycle of creating.

SECTION THREE – ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

3.1 Knowledge intensive organizations

‘Knowledge intensive’ is a socially constructed concept and therefore not possible to define as a category in absolute or objective terms (Alvesson, 2000). It is, however, possible to outline characteristics that are indicative of this type of organization and suggest that there is a distinction between ‘many professional service and high tech companies on the one hand, and more routinized service and industry companies on the other’ (Alvesson, 2000:1103). It is organizational settings that are likely to be defined as knowledge intensive which are of interest for this research. The success of such organizations is understood to be reliant upon its people bringing their knowledge, experience and intellectual capabilities to bear in the course of their work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Issues of identity are especially important in knowledge intensive work settings (Alvesson, 1994; 1998; 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Karreman & Alvesson, 2004) in part ‘due to the presence of multiple, competing identities and the space for employees to act based on their own understanding’ (Alvesson, 2000: 1102).

The type of knowledge intensive organization upon which this research is based is a marketing agency. Some of the issues mentioned above are amplified in this kind of organization due to the ambiguity of their work, uncertainties regarding professional status, frequency of change, and partnership working with client organizations. Furthermore, a central concern of marketing work is to understand and communicate the identity or image of other organizations. These aspects can further exacerbate and raise awareness of the issues of identity, making it especially important to explore the role of identity in these kinds of organizations and especially fruitful in developing understanding of the role of identity in order to make a contribution to the organization and identity literature.

The aims of this research are addressed in theoretical, methodological, and empirical terms. How this is achieved is considered on a chapter-by-chapter basis next.

SECTION FOUR – CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER ROADMAP

4.1 Chapter two - the literature

Literature in the field of identity and organizations is complex, voluminous, and growing. For the purposes of this research it has been broadly defined within two schools of thought. One school tends to emphasize identity as a socio-psychological framework whereas the other emphasizes its discursively constituted nature. This either/or approach guides those exploring identity at work to focus on either the social constructions of identity, or identity as continually emerging and negotiated through narrative and discourse. This means that a researcher studying identity at work is likely to focus on either the actions of organizational members as guided by identity frameworks, or their talk, text, discourse and narrative creation of identity. This thesis argues for the application of theoretical pluralism (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983) in order to bring together, although not merge, these two theoretical perspectives so that those approaching the study of identity, particularly in complex organizational settings, are enabled to see more of the complex picture of identity.

This picture portrays identity as symbolically constructed, providing a socially negotiated framework of work-related identities and a sense of being from which to make sense of one's self and others, *and* discursively constituted through narrative, evident in struggles related to multiple, contradictory and ambiguous identities, and a sense of becoming. Furthermore, this ongoing process is sometimes seen as 'paused' by individuals when they take a stance, or act from an identity.

The particular gaps identified within the literature, which this research aims to address are as follows:

- 1) A lack of multi-level (Foreman & Whetten, 2002), empirically supported research (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Corley, 2004) despite the recognised usefulness and importance of identity as a multi-level construct (Albert, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003)

- 2) The under-emphasis of complexity or ‘thinness’ in the treatment of identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) including a lack of attention to mid-level identities (Bartunek, 2003) and inter-organizational identity issues (Beech & Huxham, 2003), particularly in relation to everyday work context in contemporary organizations (Grimshaw et al., 2005)
- 3) The need for a constructive dialogue across literatures ‘to promote a more integrated understanding of the role that collective identity plays in creating meaning, the form, and indeed the very possibility of organizational life’ (Cornelissen et al., 2007: S12).

The integrated approach brings together in the same arena two distinct sides or aspects to identity at work – that of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, which are loosely coupled with the metaphors ‘identity as a resource’, and ‘identity as a struggle’ respectively. Identity is therefore seen as an ‘outcome’ and a ‘process’, all of which contributes to seeing more of a complex picture of identity in this kind of workplace setting by encouraging a balanced view whereby categories of identity can exhibit fluid characteristics and processes of identity creation can culminate in a crystallization of identity (Beech & Huxham, 2003).

This view of identity is achieved through constructive dialogue between literatures. Two ways of understanding identity, identity work and social identities, from two different schools of thought are brought together and applied within this study. The concept of identity work is associated more with the view that identity is a struggle, a discursive achievement, and in a constant state of becoming (Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004); whereas the term social identity is more likely to be associated with more fixed, essentialist notions of identity. In this study they are used together with the secondary concepts of front stage/back stage (Goffman, 1959), role-identities (McCall & Simmons, 1978), self-categorization (Hogg & Terry, 2000), nested and salient social identities (Feldman, 1979) to define and explore a conceptual middle ground. The secondary concepts considered suggest ways that social identities can be conceived as flexible, fluid, and socially negotiated in symbolic interaction. It is this interactive, symbolically constructed take on social identity that begins to build a theoretical middle ground between the concepts of social identities and identity work.

Within this middle ground the more socio-psychological characteristics of identity as an enduring, unified unit, can be considered together with the more discursive properties of identity pluralism, constituted in narrative and discourse (Brown, 2006). The notion of ‘fluid frameworks’ is introduced to capture this balance. An integrated perspective can be seen to sit within the realms of what Karreman and Alvesson (2004) term a ‘third direction’ related to ‘organizations where both structural and imaginary aspects are elaborate and consequential’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 163). This lines up with a similar stance taken by Beech & Huxham (2003) in their study of interorganizational collaboration.

Chapter two concludes that the integrated perspective provides a way of moving from an either/or understanding of identity at work to a both/and view (Weick, 1979, 1995a).

4.2 Chapter three – methodology and methods

The nature of this research meant that certain methodological challenges had to be overcome. The underpinning methodology had to provide sufficient flexibility to enable identity to be viewed simultaneously as both a process/struggle and an outcome/resource, yet be robust enough to hold the emergent and grounded research strategy adopted. Furthermore, as methodology guides methods, it also had to provide the practical ‘tools’ with which to gather and analyse data commensurate with undertaking cross-organizational boundary, multi-level, longitudinal organizational research. The methodology chapter is designed to achieve the following aims:

1. Explore and demonstrate how a broadly symbolic interactionist perspective is relevant to the study of the role of identity within knowledge intensive organizations, especially one that aims to emphasize the complexity of identity in these kinds of organizations. With particular reference to Mead’s (1934) concepts of the ‘I’ and ‘me’, discuss how this view can be used to underpin the view that identity is both a process/struggle and an outcome/resource.
2. Demonstrate how the concepts of social identity and identity work can be considered within the same study due to methodological similarities (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) to create a synthesized coherence (Locke and Golden-

Biddle, 1997) that can help to provide insight into the role of identity in a knowledge intensive setting.

3. Describe and evaluate the methods adopted for data collection and analysis.

The underpinning methodology is guided by symbolic interactionism, stemming largely from the work of George Herbert Mead (1934) and coined by Herbert Blumer (1969). The three premises of symbolic interactionism are as follows:

‘Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them’... ‘the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows’... ‘these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’ (Blumer, 1969: 2)

For researchers working within a symbolic interactionist school of thought, central concerns rest with the importance of meaning creation and interpretation, ontological assumptions assert that reality is socially and collectively negotiated, and that research consistent with this view of the world must attempt to understand the definitions, and the processes of defining, of the subjects of interest. This view also provides that the relationship between human action and social order are circular or mutually influenced. These assumptions have certain implications for research including the importance of understanding meaning and carrying out fieldwork in order to ground theories in data.

It is suggested that symbolic interactionism provides a conceptual foundation for the integrated approach in the Meadian (1934) concept of the ‘I and the me’ (Markova, 1987). Furthermore, Burrell & Morgan’s (1979) framework is used to show that methodological similarities mean there is an area of overlap in the assumptions about knowledge, reality, and human nature between the socio-psychological and discursive approaches, which are both drawn upon in order to consider the concepts of identity work and social identities together.

The multi-method research carried out, including observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of organizational artefacts led to a large

volume of process data, which was analysed in several ways. The most important of these can be described as an alternate template strategy (Langley, 1999), in which the social identity and identity work concepts were used as templates against which the data was held. This strategy was adopted following a more grounded, inductive phase of analysis in which observations were written up as detailed stories (Langley, 1999) and interviews were transcribed and thematically coded. It was this initial phase that led to the concepts of identity work and social identities being considered together as ‘alternative interpretations of the same events’ (Langley, 1999: 698). I found that each of the concepts on its own was incomplete in terms of providing a way of exploring, comprehensively, the role of identity emerging from the data. It was frustrating to settle for what I felt was ‘half the insight’ provided by either the social identity concept or the identity work concept.

Chapter three concludes with a discussion around whether the temptation to integrate the two concepts is something that should be avoided (Langley, 1999); it is argued that it is not. This argument is based on the three foundations of the research; (1) Mead’s concept of the I and the me which captures the important identity-pattern of being and becoming; (2) that there are similarities between the theoretical approaches according to Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) methodological framework; and (3) that there is an empirical need (fleshed out in the chapters five and six) which demands that the two approaches are considered together. The argument is concluded as follows:

- 1) The complexity and particular characteristics of contemporary knowledge intensive organizations *demand* an integrated understanding of the role of identity in the workplace that is not restricted to an either/or view of identity;
- 2) It is only a mistake to integrate the two perspectives if the combination is not complementary (which they are) and if simplicity is compromised (which I argue and demonstrate in chapters five and six that it is not)
- 3) Integrating these two perspectives is as close to being able to pin-point my moment of inspiration (Langley, 1999) in making the leap from the data to the insights provided.

4.3 Chapter four – the research setting

This chapter provides a detailed description of the Account Team (research participants), their work, the organization, and the wider industry context in which they work, upon which this study is based. An introduction is made to the multiple levels at which this research is conducted, from the organization, to the departments, to the Account Team, and then beyond the organizational boundaries to the Client and the wider context. Data is provided in the words of the research participants themselves, providing an individual, as well as collective quality to the data. The ambiguities, and sometimes contradictions of this organizational setting, both within and between organizational boundaries, are made apparent, and pointers are provided in relation to the role of identity within the research setting.

4.4 Chapters five and six – the intra- and inter-organizational relationships: demonstrating the need for and using an integrated approach

This thesis uses data collected during the research to demonstrate both the need and usefulness of an integrated approach when undertaking the type of research that has been carried out. It does this by juxtaposing the concepts of identity work and social identities to explore the intra and inter-organizational relationships within the research setting. Insight is provided into both the role of identity and the intra and inter-organizational work context.

Chapter five explores the intra-organizational relationships. It shows that identity at work can be seen as a cyclical pattern of creation, reinforcement and change, achieved through symbolic interaction, within a socially constructed framework of identifications. These frameworks are used as resources by individuals when dealing with the challenges of day-to-day work. In the context of intra-organizational relationships, this translates into shifting identifications in work relations with colleagues, the co-construction of departmental/professional identities, and a useful tool to employ when dealing with contradiction and ambiguity in problematic situations. The proposition suggested from this aspect of the research is that the organizations' identity, of which the Account Team is a part, is partly reliant upon the skills and abilities of the Agency employees to manipulate their multiple social identities in order to 'switch between' and 'think from' different social identities.

Chapter six explores the inter-organizational relationship between Client and Agency. The chapter begins by outlining the characteristics of the Client – Agency relationship. It then goes on to consider these in more depth on a department-by-department basis. This approach ensures that the multi-level, multi-perspective nature of the research is maintained. Insight is achieved by shedding light on how individuals create and use identity to deal with the daily challenges they face in this type of client relationship. The daily challenges faced by Agency employees include striking a balance between immersing themselves in the Client's services, products, culture, and needs, whilst maintaining a distinct 'Agency perspective' and also managing the frequent change, ambiguities, and contradictions that characterise much of the Agency-Client relationship.

This chapter highlights a paradox of the Agency-Client relationship. This paradox lies in the notion that Agency employees need their relationship with Client to secure positive evaluations of their work related identities, however, the characteristics of a successful Client-Agency relationship, and what is required of the Agency personnel to achieve it, such as their skills and ability to switch between and think from different perspectives, puts at risk the very social identities or guiding frameworks which helps the Agency employees to create the relationship. This is why it is crucial that they manage their identity struggles, and fully utilise their social identities as resources across organizational boundaries.

4.5 Chapter seven – discussion

The purpose of chapter seven is to provide a synopsis of the insights, discuss the implications in terms of how this thesis has furthered understanding of the role of identity in knowledge intensive organizations, and in terms of the integrated approach proposed. It also considers further the integrated perspective proposed.

The insights highlighted include the notion that when approaching the study of identity in a complex, knowledge intensive organizational setting it is useful to view the concepts of social identities and identity work as both relevant and related. This

enables identity to be seen as resource and a struggle, a cyclical process that is deeply embedded in the everyday work context of the research participants. Examples include how Agency employees maintain a closeness with and distance from the Client, how they construct multiple level problems and ways to deal with these problems, and how they switch between multiple identities in order to think from different perspectives and deal with some of the challenges and contradictions involved in their work. In order to achieve these insights it is suggested that identity might be seen as a pattern, described as a fluid framework, emerging over time whereby periods of becoming, when identity is worked at, struggle with, defined and created, are punctuated with moments of being, whereby a strong sense of professional identity, for example, is seen to guide the research participant's actions.

Noticing that within an everyday work context, social identities other than organizational, may be more salient and more influential in terms of how individuals behave, make sense and interact, highlights the multi-level benefit of this research. These social identities include, for example, the team, department, function and profession. Within the research setting it is seen how the organizational members shift and switch rapidly and frequently between these relatively stable constructions in order to provide different perspectives on the same situation. This research, therefore, furthers the understanding in how these different level identities are inter-linked, influence, and are influenced by individual behaviour in work place settings. This assists in developing a richer treatment of the identity concept.

The theoretical implications of this research are discussed in terms of how a grounded, inductive study, carried out within a symbolic interactionist methodology, combined with an emerging 'familiarity with theory' (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 968) affected how I made sense of the research topic. During the initial phases of data collection, I was attuned to aspects of the theory but I had no a priori hypothesis to test. Instead I plunged myself into the data in an attempt to build theory from the ground up (Langley, 1999). I observed the research participants defining and creating their identities *and* using the identities they created to guide and justify differentiated perspectives in the course of their day-to-day work. In order to make sense of these observations I applied the concepts of identity work and social identities as alternate templates (Langley, 1999) as a way to make sense of what was going on. Each on

their own did not provide sufficient theoretical scope to explore and analyse what I had observed, but placed side by side they provided a more comprehensive way of making sense of what was going on in the research setting. The advantage of such an approach is defended in terms of Weick's argument that, "the contribution of social science does not lie in validated knowledge, but rather in the suggestion of relationships and connections that had previously not been suspected" (1989: 524)' (Quoted in Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1026).

Within chapter seven the concept of 'fluid frameworks' is discussed as a way to conceptualise the relationship between social identities and identity work. This concept suggests that social identities and identity work can be seen as linked in a dynamic pattern over time of creating – creation – creating, or becoming – being – becoming. It is argued that this pattern is deeply embedded and crucial in carrying out Agency work. Furthermore, it is argued that this process is inextricably linked with dealing with the day-to-day challenges in this kind of work, which act as a trigger to engage in both identity work (struggling to define who one is), and as a trigger to opt for one particular perspective that is associated with a particular social identity (using identity as a resource). The evidence of this pattern of cycling between identity as becoming and identity as being within this organizational setting supports the picture presented by Beech and Huxham (2003) in which the tension of fluidity and crystallization of identity is highlighted.

The argument is also made that multiple identities can be seen as resilient and resourceful. This contrasts with previous research where it has been suggested that individuals engage in identity work as a way of 'aiming to achieve feelings of a coherent and strong self, necessary for coping with work tasks' (Alvesson, 2000: 991). Evidence from the research in hand suggests that rather than counteract a fragmented sense of self, when it comes to coping with the challenges faced in this particular work setting, the research participants actively seek to achieve feelings of *multiple* strong selves, and learn to use their multiple and fragmented sense of self to their own and their organization's benefit. They do this by using it to bring multiple perspectives and multi-level solutions to problems and managing the paradoxical relationship with their Client.

This chapter also discusses how identity related coping strategies are engaged within the context of the inter-organizational relationship studied. One strategy Agency members employ to 'protect' their organizational-based social identity is to make their Clients believe that they, Agency employees, are more 'part of' Client than they actually are, or identify more strongly with the Client than they actually do. In other words, Agency employees engage in identity work to convince their Clients that they have a stronger sense of client-identity than they actually feel. This concept is explored in terms of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) whereby an 'act' is put on for the Client, but rather than an emotional act, it is an identity act, or a display of a social identity which is not genuinely felt. A second strategy employed is to attempt to create a shared sense of identity with the Client. It is suggested that Agency employees create a sense of shared identity, which becomes a new, mutually acceptable social identity that spans levels and organizational boundaries. This is discussed in terms of a temporary 'hybrid organizational identity'.

Finally, chapter seven discusses further the integrated perspective, suggesting that although it is not a formal theory, it is a robust attempt at providing a way of viewing identity in complex, knowledge intensive organizational settings which emphasizes the complex role of identity within these settings.

A link is also made between the integrated approach proposed in this research and the Agency-Client relationship studied. Both are concerned with creating a third way/perspective without losing the value of the two different elements that are drawn together to achieve the integration.

4.6 Chapter eight – conclusion

Chapter eight offers a discussion of the scope and generalisability of the research. This is done by turning to Thorngate (1976) and Weick's (1979), contention that 'any research strategy demands tradeoffs among accuracy, generality, and simplicity' (Langley, 1999). The argument is made that an accurate and relatively simple interpretation of the role of identity at work has been reached. Any claims of generalisability are limited to what was learned from the research participants as they recounted previous experience. It is suggested that the research in hand does not

allow us to say too much about the role of identity at work beyond the type of organization studied, and as in-depth study, this should not be expected. It does, however, point to the importance of understanding specific settings in some depth, and in the case of this thesis, leads to the proposal and limited development of an integrated approach or balanced theoretical perspective and interesting insights into the role of identity within the research setting. Other examples of research within the identity and organizations literature, which appear to take a similar approach (Beech & Huxham, 2003; Karreman & Alvesson, 2004;), are discussed as a way of evaluating the usefulness of the advocated approach.

Chapter eight also discusses the contribution made by this research in providing insight on a particular phenomenon in a particular setting. It is suggested that more of the complex picture of identity at work is seen, more of the non-managerial voices are heard, and more of a process, or pattern of identity at work can be understood. An evaluation of the research is proposed, according to the case-study inspired design, and by how closely the research itself was undertaken according to symbolic interactionist principles. These principles are evidenced in the interest paid to how individuals interactively and symbolically construct meaning and interpret their organizational worlds.

Finally, it is suggested that the approach proposed within the context of this research has been used as a resource to provide insight into the role of identity in this research, but in the context of the wider identity and organization literature, it is understood as emerging and in need of further development. It is also suggested the theme of paradox and the possibility of exploring in more depth some of the identity-rich themes that were recognised, such as how work attire plays a role in identity at work, offers further research opportunities.

SECTION FIVE – CONCLUSION

Contemporary research endeavours must strive to explore complicated, ambiguous, rapidly changing organizational worlds whilst also couching their understandings in terms of how the people who work in them interpret and experience them. This research undertakes to do this by achieving the following aims:

Summary of aims

- Undertake a study that pays attention to how individuals make sense of themselves, those with whom they interact, and their work in complex organizational contexts
- Make a contribution to the identity and organizations field by undertaking a longitudinal, multi-level, cross-organizational boundary, empirical study within a knowledge intensive, rapidly changing, complex and client dominated organizational setting
- Further understanding of the complexities and subtleties, of the role of identity at work by retaining a quality of wholeness to the picture presented
- Explore the role of identity as a resource in a knowledge intensive organizational setting
- Explore the role of identity as struggle in a knowledge intensive organizational setting
- Develop an integrated approach that can facilitate a balanced perspective when undertaking research into the study of identity at work in complex organizational settings.

By fulfilling these aims, it is argued that this thesis addresses an under-emphasis of the complexity of the role of identity in knowledge intensive workplace settings by bringing balance and comprehensiveness through a multi-level, multi-perspective, empirical study, approached in an integrated way.

Chapter Two: Literature review

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

When studying concepts as complex as ‘identity’ and ‘organizations’ it is important to comprehensively engage with the topics and recognise their complexity, both in theoretical and in practical terms. One way to achieve this is by looking at the empirical world through multiple perspectives, or employing ‘theoretical pluralism’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983). The advantage of such an approach to the study of organizations is that it ‘helps one gain a more comprehensive understanding of organizational life’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 245), as each perspective, or lens, can offer a partial account or view of what is going on. When perspectives are used together, a greater understanding of the topics can be generated and novel aspects of organizational life can be brought into focus. Developing understanding and uncovering novel aspects of organizational life are important in this research, as it aims to provide insight and a greater understanding of identity in a specific organizational setting by drawing together two key concepts from two different approaches.

1.2 Moving toward an integrated perspective – a framing of the two approaches being considered in juxtaposition

Whilst recognising that different schools of thought provide ‘sometimes convergent, sometimes complementary, and sometimes profoundly different or contradictory views’ (Gioia, 1998: 25), in my attempts to make sense of the large and complex body of literature on identity and organizations, related perspectives have been grouped into two approaches. Firstly, there are those that can be described as more traditional social-psychological approaches, and secondly, there are those that can be described as alternative or more discursive approaches. The groupings can be understood as follows:

‘a traditional approach to identity studies sees individual or group’s identity as that which is consistent overtime and which is particular to the individual or

group (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Ford and Ford, 1994...and an alternative approach...which sees identities as always being in processes of becoming rather than being “finished” (Chia, 1999).’ (Beech, 2006).

I have made sense of these divisions according to whether an approach is underpinned by the assumption that identity is a social and symbolic construction, or product of interactions between individuals and groups, which is conceived to be the more traditional, social-psychological approach; or whether identity is assumed to be continuously created through the ‘text’, ‘talk’, ‘discourse’ and ‘narrative’ of individuals, seen as the alternative, discursive approach. Discursive approaches emphasize the importance and the constructive and constitutive powers of language and narrative in the creation of identity (Czarniawska, 1997; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a; Brown, 2006), whilst more socio-psychological approaches emphasize the importance of social interaction in creating consistent and coherent identity which is conceived ‘as a framework for understanding oneself that is formed and sustained via social interaction’ (Gioia, 1998: 19).

It is possible to suggest potential overlaps and less compatible elements between the two approaches. A discursive approach guides the researcher toward a focus on the continuous processes of identity creation, whereas a more socio-psychological approach, although still dynamic, suggests there is an end-point to the identity creation process, understood as a ‘framework’, upon which the researcher’s attention may come to rest. The argument made in this thesis is that in longitudinal studies of identity in complex organizational settings it is possible to see a more comprehensive picture of the role of identity by considering the alternative and traditional approaches side by side. Previous studies of identity in organizational settings that have in various ways sought a common ground, or way to view the processes and products of identity construction, include Beech & Huxham (2003), and Karreman & Alvesson (2004). The insights from these studies regarding identity in organizations suggests that there are benefits in adopting and developing such an approach when one is seeking to explore identity in complex organizational settings.

In terms of the compatibility of the approaches with respect to the study of identity, common ground can be found in their mutual focus on the interactions between

people (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and their shared interest in people creating, modifying and interpreting their worlds, discussed further in Chapter three, section 2.7. There are differences in that socio-psychological approaches may be guided to approach ‘self-as-entity’ whereas more discursive approaches focus ‘on the methods of constructing the self’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The approach used for this study pays attention to both aspects of identity through the concepts of ‘identity work’ (Alvesson, 1994; Lilley, 1997; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004; Beech, 2006), and ‘social identities’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the study of identity overtime in complex organizational settings it is useful to juxtapose the social identity *and* identity work concepts in order to consider how identity is created and used by organizational members. The aim of this chapter is to define points of commonality between the two approaches that create the possibility of an integrated approach.

1.3 Moving toward an integrated perspective – a framing of the two concepts being considered in juxtaposition

The touch-point between the two main approaches outlined is proposed in the shape of a relationship between two concepts, identity work and social identity. Each of these is usually associated with discursive or socio-psychological perspectives respectively, and not usually applied within the same study. By drawing together these approaches and proposing a relationship between them a bridge between the two literatures is created. Considering identity work and social identities, within the same study, draws attention to the complexity of the role of identity in terms of how individuals and groups engage in identity creation process *and* use the identity frameworks created to deal with some of the challenges they face.

1.4 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to outline aspects of different schools of thought that have been used to explore the concept of identity in work organizations, and discuss their influence and relevance to the study in hand. When undertaking this review, due

to the multi-level nature of the research, relevant literature is from studies conducted at different levels, including organizational identity (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Foreman & Whetten, 2002), group/team level identity (Bartunek, 2003; Beech & Huxham, 2003), and individual level research (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This literature is reviewed and gaps in understanding the role of identity at work are highlighted. The gaps are summarised as follows:

- 1) A lack of multi-level (Foreman & Whetten, 2002), empirically supported research (Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Corley, 2004) despite the recognised usefulness and importance of identity as a multi-level construct (Albert, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003)
- 2) The under-emphasis of complexity or ‘thinness’ in the treatment of identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) including a lack of attention to mid-level identities (Bartunek, 2003) and inter-organizational identity issues (Beech & Huxham, 2003), particularly in relation to everyday work context in contemporary organizations (Grimshaw et al., 2005)
- 3) The need for a constructive dialogue across literatures ‘to promote a more integrated understanding of the role that collective identity plays in creating meaning, the form, and indeed the very possibility of organizational life’ (Cornelissen et al., 2007: S12).

It is contended that an integrated approach helps to fill the gaps identified by focusing the researcher’s attention on cross-organizational, organizational, workplace, and team/group levels of identity (multi and mid-level gaps) and how these are created and used by employees in day to day work contexts (dialogue across literatures). The integrated approach helps to highlight two aspects to identity at work, both of which play an important role in how both employees and managers make sense of themselves, their work, their clients, and one another, in the context of everyday work. The two sides, or aspects are ‘identity as resource’ and ‘identity as struggle’.

The schools of thought used within this research tend to fall within either a socio-psychological approach or a discursive approach. This is important to note because the different theoretical interpretations of these approaches, and their different

emphasis regarding the nature of identity could provide opposing guides to the way research is conducted. For studies such as this one, therefore, which aim to provide insight into a complex topic, it is important to acknowledge and make use of the distinctions and overlaps of alternative theoretical perspectives. It is argued therefore, that by working with these distinctions and overlaps it is possible to recognise identity at work as both a ‘struggle’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), and a ‘resource’; as representing both a sense of ‘becoming’, and a sense of ‘being’; and as both a ‘process’, and an ‘outcome’. This dual aspect of identity becomes more easily perceived if one approaches the field of research with a perspective diverse enough to enable this complex picture to be seen.

1.5 Structure of the chapter

Following the current introductory section, section two of this chapter outlines the social identity concept and the related concepts that develop and add to this concept within the context of a socio-psychological approach. Section three outlines a discursive approach to identity and introduces the identity work concept within the context of a discursive approach. Section four focuses on the notion of individual identity at work. Section five discusses identity at an organizational level. Section six defines the characteristics of the particular types of organization of interest. Finally, section seven brings together the threads of the argument that point to the need for an integrated approach to the study of identity at work.

SECTION TWO – THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Social identity

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) has played a significant role in framing research on the nature of identity (Beech & Huxham, 2003). It offers a social-psychological perspective on how individuals relate to, or identify with, social groupings or categories (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bartunek, 2003). This theory suggests that ‘people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (Tajfel & Turner, 1985)’ (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 20). Social identity is considered to be the part of a person’s identity resulting from identifying with a broad

social category linked, for example, to one's position within a system such as a society (policeman, priest, Mayor) company hierarchy (managing director, office junior) or system of military ranks (private, corporal, sergeant and so on) (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

The definitions associated with social identity tend to assume that identity is a framework of categories into which individuals are placed, or place themselves, according to the rules and expectations of society. An approach guided by social identity theory suggests a pre-existing structure, which informs the constructive and constitutive efforts of individual actors. Due to its emphasis on structure over agency, and measurements over meaning, social identity theory does not provide the guiding methodology or approach for my research. As discussed in the next chapter, this approach would not sit comfortably within my own symbolic interactionist view of the world, which centres on the importance of meaning and a symbolically constructed, socially negotiated reality. It does, however, together with further theories, such as McCall and Simmons 'role-identities' (1978), and Hogg and Terry's 'self categorization theory' (2000), both of which are discussed below, provide a useful way of exploring the role of identity at work. Furthermore, within a symbolic interactionist methodology it is the meanings of the social identities that are of interest, thus, as with all social constructions, they are viewed as symbolically created and negotiated in interaction between people.

2.2 Social identification

To say that individuals identify with groups or social categories means that they define themselves at least in part according to their affiliation with them (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton, 2000). In other words, at least part of each individual's identity is shaped or defined by the various groups to which he or she feels a psychological attachment (Brown, 1969). In the workplace these categories tend to fall within the socially ratified definitions of sub-teams, teams, departments, workplaces, organizations, and professions to which people are both 'assigned', for example, when they accept a position doing a particular job within a particular organization, and which they create, shape and change, by improvising, negotiating and bringing with them their own ideas, conceptions, interpretations and

past experiences to new roles (Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Ibarra, 1999). The concepts of social identity and identification are well developed and many related concepts provide a rich texture to theoretical explorations in the field, some of which are discussed next.

2.3 Self-categorization, salient social identities, and nested social identities

Self-categorization theory, an extension of social identity theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000), argues that because organizations are inherently messy, disorganized and chaotic, people attempt to shape and cope with the potential chaos of their working life through the categorization of oneself and others. As well as suggesting why people 'self-categorize', this theory attempts to explain how individuals come to act and know themselves according to the norms and cultures of the groups to which they belong:

‘social categorization of self – self-categorization – cognitively assimilates self to the ingroup prototype and, thus, depersonalizes self-conception. This transformation of self is the process underlying group phenomena, because it brings self-perception and behaviour in line with the contextually relevant ingroup prototype’ (Hogg & Terry, 2000; 123).

This extension of social identity theory suggests that individuals do not merely conform to a social category because they are assigned to it, instead, they actively engage those available to them, see themselves as part of the group, and make salient a group identity over a personal one. A central feature of this theory is ‘the responsiveness of social identity to immediate social contexts’ (Hogg & Terry, 2000) as captured in the term ‘salient social identity’. A salient social identity is the social identity that becomes most prominent in a social setting and is most ‘active in guiding social perception’ (Ullrich et al., 2007: 30) and ‘affects the way actions are taken’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 130).

Salient social identity has also been linked with the term nested identities:

‘In the largest generic sphere of identity...there are smaller, meaningful, identifiable subunits. Under some conditions, the salient identity is with the larger unit, while at other times the salient identity is part of the smaller unit. Identities which have this component of larger and smaller units I have termed *nested identities*. Like Russian nesting dolls in which there are dolls within dolls within dolls, many identities are nested so that within a given sphere of life, there may be identities within identities within identities’ (Feldman, 1979: 401).

The flexibility of the concept of nested identities is particularly useful for exploring the complexities of identity in the workplace because it can illuminate a multifaceted side to social identities such as subgroup identities (i.e. groups within groups); identity looking different to insiders and outsiders; that moving between identities is about moving between inner and outer circles of nested identities; and that moving between identities can involve a shift in level (i.e. from team to organization to industry) (Allen et al.,1983).

The notion of nested identities has been useful to the present study as it has enabled the conceptualisation of identity at team, group, department, profession, organization, industry levels and provided a way to understand these as related by way of the smaller/lower level units being nested, or part of the larger/higher level units. The concept of nested identities is also useful in conceptualising how social identities are related, whilst at the same time, can also conflict with one another as they represent a multiplicity of organizational targets for identification which may represent diverse and competing goals for the individual who identifies with several groups.

The concepts of nested, salient and social identities can be complemented with the more dynamic theory of self-categorisation which helps to understand how a social identity is actively ‘claimed’, or how an individual comes to act or think from a group perspective, rather than an individual one. This theory assumes that that individuals are capable of depersonalisation and immersing oneself into a particular group which can produce ‘normative behaviour, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, positive ingroup attitudes and cohesion, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion and empathy,

collective behaviour, shared norms, and mutual influence' (Hogg & Terry, 2000: 123). In this sense:

‘self-perceptions can vary on a continuum, where at one extreme a person experiences him or herself in depersonalized terms exclusively as group member, defined by the shared characteristics of that group, and at the other extreme the individual is defined by his or her unique personality (Tuner, 1982). In this way, *depersonalisation* is a product of the salience of social categories including the self and brought about by category accessibility and fit’ (Ullrich et al., 2007: 30).

As identity salience changes over time so the individual places herself on different parts of this continuum, or moves between the various social identities available to her. The importance of the concepts explored above is in the richness and complexity they add to the concept of social identity. In the next section further concepts are outlined which add texture to the concept of social identity, and which play a part in developing the thesis in hand.

2.4 The dramaturgical approach

The dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959) makes use of theatrical terms to explore, explain, and understand human conduct and interaction. Terms such as role, character, performance, actor, audience, front stage, back stage, cues, and props are employed as a way to delineate or compartmentalise when a person is being her true self (the actor), or when she is engaged in acting, or putting on a performance. This framework also suggests that audience (both internal and external to the individual) has a part to play in evaluating ‘performances’ (McCall & Simmons, 1978). From this perspective, performances are the images or presentations of a certain character that each individual plays, or attempts to play, in order to convince others that he is who he claims to be in a way that is credible and plausible within the role being played. The actor playing the character, the performer, may play her part with varying degrees of sincerity and/or cynicism, and may deliver or present her character

to an audience with varying degrees of belief and self-belief in the character being played (Goffman, 1959).

2.5 Relevance of the dramaturgical approach to the present study

There are two ways in which the present study has been influenced by Goffman's work. Firstly, Goffman's work serves to remind that social identities are not simply conferred upon us by external factors, and that, as recently pointed out by Llewellyn (2004: 948); 'actors routinely negotiate the sense in which social identities and specific activities might be linked'. The danger of 'only focusing on the external or regulative (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) aspects of social identity' (Llewellyn, 2004: 948) is that social identities might be perceived as restraining the individual's freedom to act on their own volition, or constraining their access to a unique sense of self. The notions of actors choosing aspects of their performance, or negotiating which actions are associated with which social identities, importantly suggests a degree of flexibility and creativity with respect to how individuals create and shape their social identities.

This study recognises that not only do individuals and groups 'confront the categories that society applies to them' and 'in most situations...have the freedom to choose between a number of correct categorisations' (Llewellyn, 2004: 948), individuals are capable of constructing and maintaining several social identities in a work context, some of which may conflict.

Secondly, this study is influenced by the idea that people may act differently depending upon whether they perceive themselves to be 'front stage' or 'back stage'. This conceptual division is put to use when exploring some of the cross-boundary working between the client and Agency, noting in particular how the concept of front and back stage is problematized in the kinds of organizations where organizational boundaries are crossed on a regular basis, making them appear permeable (Swart & Kinnie, 2003), due to the frequent physical presence of 'the client' within the supplier's offices, and vice versa.

2.6 Interactionist perspective

The interactionist perspective (McCall and Simmons, 1978) provides an important thesis on identity and interactions. By contrasting their views to others which emphasize a 'scripted' view of role, they introduce the concept of 'role-identities' which emphasizes the importance of 'improvisation' and 'the more pervasive influence of concrete relationships and social groups in shaping frames of reference' (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 7). This concept suggests that it is interactions between people, rather than the abstract social classifications by which they might be categorised, which influences the way they define their relationship between one another.

The concept of role-identity serves to remind that social identities are not 'fixed givens' or homogenous, but that they are interpreted, negotiated and change over time by way of interactions between people. Furthermore, and what is particularly important to this research is that they 'constitute an important set of those perspectives or frames of reference for appraising one's thoughts and actions' (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 67) and that 'the reflective self of the individual in question' provides 'the most important "reference point" of all' (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 7). In other words, who an individual perceives himself to be in any given situation affects the way that person makes sense of the situation in which he finds himself. The concept of role-identities reinforces the dramaturgical perspective on social identities, highlighting that individuals do not unquestioningly adopt a social role, or merely live up to (or down to) the expectations of others who might make assumptions about that person knowing only their social identity. Instead, people adapt, improvise, and engage in an '*interactive* role, as opposed to the *social* role' (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 64). In this way, role-identities can be seen as an interactive personalisation of social identity, further highlighting the creative and socially constructed aspect of work-related social identities.

2.7 Relevance of the concept of role-identities to the present study

The notion of improvised social identities has been an important influence on this study because, firstly it supports the assumptions that social identities are, to some extent, interactively created rather than conferred, and secondly, because it highlights

the importance of concrete relationships, or interactions, in the creative process of individuals defining and shaping, who they are. Furthermore, the view that individuals are actors who improvise their roles, and proactively create their own scenery, is useful and important in exploring the ambiguous nature of knowledge intensive organizational settings. This argument is illustrated next.

In work contexts where roles, work output, and relationships between organizational members can be seen as relatively unambiguous, and the way that people do their work is highly predictable or strongly governed by management or convention, there is little room for manoeuvre or negotiation in terms of one's role-identity (McCall & Simmons, 1978). In these contexts social identities are more prescribed and entrenched. In today's complex workplaces, however, particularly those that might be defined as knowledge intensive, with fuzzy and even ambiguous boundaries (Harrison & St John, 1996) with difficult to evaluate work outcomes, and relatively autonomous working practices, some social identities may be less prescribed, entrenched, or taken for granted. It is therefore more likely that individuals will have to engage in some kind of improvisation, negotiation and interpretation regarding their social identities during the course of their everyday work lives.

2.8 Ingroups and outgroups

The concepts of ingroups and outgroups have proved useful in developing this thesis by offering a way of exploring and explaining why individuals might behave towards others in different ways:

‘when people are separated into groups, even if their membership is based on minimal or random criteria, they quickly identify with their group and tend to view members of other groups in a less favourable light’ (Bartunek, 2003; 14).

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) people ‘categorise and compare groups (their own and others) in order to provide a sense of self reference, to reduce ambiguity about themselves within a larger grouping, and to enhance their self concept’ (Bartunek, 2003; 14). It is also suggested in social identity theory that people are

motivated to achieve and maintain a positive self image, and one of the ways they can do this is by developing group identities and drawing intergroup comparisons that favor their own group over others' (Bartunek, 2003: 14). It has been argued that creating positive social identities *relies* on ingroup – outgroup comparisons:

‘When presented with an opportunity to discriminate against an outgroup, however, positive social identity may be achieved by favouring the ingroup. Thus, the outgroup represents more than the antithesis of the ingroup: the fact that the outgroup exists forces individuals to identify with the ingroup if they are to maintain a positive social and self-identity. In effect, the presence of the outgroup generates ingroup camaraderie...’ (Allen et al. 1983; 104-105).

A recent paper by Rink and Ellemers (2007) provides a strong argument that simplistic divisions of ingroup and outgroup in terms of positive identifications with an ingroup can be misleading as it is possible that a common group identity may be formed when individuals evaluate their differences in a positive way. This is particularly so when the group or team relies on task related diversity for its success. My study supports Rink and Ellemers’ argument, and suggests further that ingroup – outgroup divisions are too static in terms of understanding the role of identity in day-to-day, knowledge intensive organizational settings. This is because groupings can change rapidly, depending on the context of a given situation, and the placement of an individual on their own continuum between individual and collective perspectives.

Social identity theory tells us that identity can provide an individual with a way of viewing situations from a ‘group’ perspective. It can also suggest a guide on how to act depending upon how one views’ a particular situation:

‘in the *relevant* intergroup situations, individuals will not act *as* individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1979: 35).

Self-categorization theory develops this idea by suggesting that an individual ‘cognitively assimilates self to the ingroup prototype’ (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In this

case, ‘prototypes are typically not checklists of attributes but, rather, fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership, often in the form of representations of exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features). Prototypes embody all attributes that characterise groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors’ (Hogg & Terry, 2000: 123-124). It is this embodiment of attributes that are adopted as one’s own that enables the individual to act from the perspective of a social identity, or group to which he or she belongs, which can be seen as a way of guiding and justifying their behaviour against a socially acceptable set of norms and values - those created by the interactions within and between the group with which the individual identifies.

2.9 From social identity to identity work

Despite being able to add richness and texture to the concept of social identity through the various related concepts discussed, the concept of social identity does not adequately explain how the dynamic aspects of identity can be understood. The question of how identities are achieved tends to be under-specified, and often how they are moved between remains unexplored. To develop an integrated perspective that encourages those approaching the field of identity at work to take a broader view of what might be seen there, consideration is now given to what has been termed an alternative view of identity (Beech, 2006). The alternative view emphasises processes of identity creation and tends to focus on the discursive or narrated nature of identity (Brown, 2006). Discursive approaches introduce the concept of ‘identity work’ which is outlined below in section 3.3. In order to frame the concept within its theoretical context a brief outline of what is meant by a discursive approach is offered.

SECTION THREE – DISCURSIVE APPROACHES

3.1 Introduction

Potter and Wetherell (1987) define discourse in terms of ‘all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 7). The term is utilized at different levels of analysis, such as a local study of social text, including talk and written text, and as a way to approach ‘the study of

social reality as discursively constructed and maintained' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b: 1126). Discursive approaches, such as narrative (Czarniawska, 1997; Brown, 2006), provide a different way of viewing the concept of identity.

3.2 Discursive approaches to the concept of identity.

Within discursive approaches:

‘essentialist notions of identity are rejected, rather, identity is in flux, in a permanent state of becoming as various social and linguistic constructs (or discourses) vie with one another for supremacy (Thomas & Linstead, 2002: 75).

A discursively created self is one in which self-identity is (re)constructed ‘in interactions with others but also in “conversation” with ourselves’ (Blenkinsopp and Stalker, 2004: 420). This means that, due to the salience of change, contradiction and fragmentation in contemporary work settings people have to:

‘search for ways of actively dealing with identity. Different available discourses may be difficult to ‘choose’ between, or – formulated from another (poststructuralist) angle – no discourse is sufficiently strongly backed up by material and social support to offer a powerful grip over the subject. This makes identity constructions precarious and calls for on-going identity work’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1167).

Czarniawska argues that ‘identities are performed in conversation, that what we achieve in conversation is positioning *vis-à-vis* other people, and against the background of a plot that is negotiated by those taking part in the conversation’ (2000: 275). This view, which sees identity as fully emerging, suggests that identity is entirely contingent on time and place and created through narrative. Identity in this sense is ‘de-centred’. It can change over time and retrospectively as it is subject to fashion, interpretation, and memory. In this sense ‘the Self is produced, reproduced, and maintained in conversations, past and present’ (Czarniawska, 2000: 275). From this perspective identities are *never* ‘given’. They are continuously worked at, strived

for, created, and achieved, often involving some kind of 'struggle' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Discursive approaches, therefore, are particularly helpful in studying identity during periods of organizational change, or in organizations where change is frequent and ambiguity common-place, as it provides a way to see the processes, dynamics, or states of 'becoming' that exist between states of 'being' (Beech & Johnson, 2005).

Furthermore, this kind of approach can draw attention to the alternative and important perspectives of employees throughout the organizational hierarchy by seeing all organizational members as potential authors; writing, talking, and telling stories to create their social worlds (Brown, 2006) which adds to the richness, complexity, and wholeness of a picture of identity at work. Discursive approaches emphasize the notion that identity is destabilized, decentred, and tied to discourse (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). These approaches bring into play the important concept of 'identity work' (Alvesson, 1994; Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004, Beech, 2006).

3.3 Identity work

The concept of identity work plays an important part in developing an integrated approach. It emphasizes that identity is something that has to be worked at, fought for, developed and not taken for granted or assumed. The term has been attributed to Potter and Wetherell (1987), and is based on the idea that identity is a process in which an individual is concerned with achieving consistency between sense of self and presentation of self through a self-narrative (Blenkinsopp and Stalker, 2004). It has been suggested that this is the way an individual manages his or her identity, in periods of transition (Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004) and in everyday/routine situations (Alvesson, 1994).

In his paper on managing identity and impressions in an advertising agency, Alvesson (1994) views identity work as a function of the descriptions used by advertising professionals when they talk about their work, their organization, their client, and themselves. He argues that these descriptions or themes of talk (discourse) can 'have a moderate constructive effect in the long term' (Alvesson, 1994: 554). In other words identity work achieves various identities (for example, organization, client,

self). Lilley (1997) uses the term identity work in his paper examining the similarities between the worlds of managers and critical management researchers. He suggests that 'battles between academic disciplines and across the academy/practice divide are resources for identity work'. He further suggests that the worlds or realms that managers and critical management researchers build for themselves through *rhetorical devices and styles* 'present opportunities and threats for the maintenance of identity' (Lilley, 1997; 51, emphasis in original). Both Lilley (1997) and Alvesson (1994) suggest that identity work is carried out in the face of threats to identity, and that change and ambiguity present opportunities for identity work.

In his paper on gender and identity at work, Alvesson (2000) suggests the following purpose for identity work:

'aiming to achieve feelings of a coherent and strong self, necessary for coping with work tasks and social relations as well as existential issues' (Alvesson, 2000: 991).

Other purposes of identity work suggested in Alvesson's papers include the regulation of identity, formation of identity, establishing credibility and legitimacy, selling one's profession (1994; 552) and establishing uniqueness and a certain distance to the client company (1994; 555). He also suggests that identity work is carried out when a person is attempting to 'counteract a fragmented sense of self'. Sveningsson and Alvesson argue that 'identity work is a ... fruitful approach emphasizing dynamic aspects and on-going struggles around creating a sense of self and providing temporary answers to the question 'who am I' (or 'who are we') and what do I (we) stand for? (2003: 1164)'.

Discursive approaches emphasize the decentred, fragmented, processual side of identity, focusing on identity as becoming. They emphasize the importance of words, talk and text and encourage a linguistically created view of identity, which is a crucial contribution to understanding the role of identity in complex, frequently changing organizational settings. In certain organizational contexts, such as the one studied, it is important, however, to have a view that also draws attention to identity as a state of being. For example, discursive approaches can obscure from the researchers' view

the importance of identity for guiding and retrospectively justifying behaviour. In complex and ambiguous everyday workplace settings, in which the frameworks of identities, as well as the creation of them, are important to the individuals trying to make sense of their complex organizational world, it is necessary to draw from aspects of both approaches in order to make sense of what is going on. Relating the point back to Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) point above, in focusing on the struggles it is important to not lose sight of the albeit temporary outcomes of those struggles.

3.4 Methodological implications: a brief note

The two approaches outlined differ in terms of their methodological standpoints. One assumes reality is a social construction, the other, a linguistic construction. The methodological standpoint taken for this research is symbolic interactionism, which, as discussed in the next chapter, suggests a small area of common ground between the two approaches. In terms of understanding the nature of identity it is argued that whilst each approach recognises identity in different ways, there is only a fine line to be drawn. It is suggested that this differentiation can be seen in terms of whether one focuses on identity creating processes, or whether the momentary pauses in the creating process, the 'creation', is given precedence.

The next section of this chapter begins to focus on how elements of socio-psychological and discursive approaches can be drawn together, and why, in fact, they should be considered side-by-side when carrying out exploratory research in the kind of workplace setting studied in this research.

SECTION FOUR – IDENTITY AT WORK

4.1 Introduction

Research in the area of identity at work tends to be concerned with how individuals construct their professional, organizational, and other work-related identities, and how these identities are displayed and managed in a work context. In this sense, a socio-psychological approach would suggest that:

‘Identity is most usefully viewed as a general, if individualized, framework for understanding oneself that is formed and sustained via social interaction... individuals learn to assign themselves socially constructed labels through personal symbolic interactions with others. Therefore, identity is fundamentally a relational and comparative concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1985)’ (Gioia, 1998: 19).

This definition highlights two key aspects of identity. Firstly, identity is how an individual understands or makes sense of her self. It is a reflexive construct. Secondly, that this framework of understanding is achieved through interaction. A discursive alternative to the above definition would question the very idea of an identity framework, and highlight instead the emergent, precarious, contradictory, fluid and processual nature of identity (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). The next part of this chapter explores how these definitions can work together.

4.2 Highlighting the interplay between freedom and constraint

Despite some degree of common ground in terms of interest in the interactive and symbolic construction and negotiation of identity rarely are the two approaches, nor concepts that sit within them, considered in juxtaposition. I have identified a small number of studies that do. For example, Karreman and Alvesson (2001) consider social identities from a more discursive perspective, describing them as ‘the social and interactive co-construction of a shared identity within a work community’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001: 64). They also introduce the notion of the ‘soft iron-cage’ of control (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004) suggesting that in terms of control employee interpretation is important. Employees must apply their own judgement to make sense of the guidelines suggested by the socially ratified constructions within the workplace, as opposed to these constructions representing a determining factor in action. It is therefore argued that identity is indeed processual, in a state of flux, and fluid, but that at work these aspects may be contained within a relatively fixed, albeit socially constructed, framework. The framework is multi-level, multi-faceted, and provides the individual with a good deal of autonomy and freedom to define their own identities, but it does involve boundaries and restrictions within which the individual

acts as if he is contained, and is at least influenced, to some degree. The framework can be understood in practical terms as the organizational hierarchy, job titles and descriptions, performance reward systems, policies, procedures and such like which influence and curb an individual's freedom in terms of their 'identity conversations' (Czarniawska, 2000), but it will not eliminate the conversations, improvisations, or the possibility of changing the framework itself.

In order to place the individual experience of identity at work within its organizational context, the next section of this chapter makes a shift in level and turns to literature that focuses on the identity *of* organizations as opposed to identity *in* organizations. This is important to address in terms of the individual's experience of work, because in research terms, this individual level has become divorced from more organizational factors (Grimshaw et al., 2005).

SECTION FIVE – IDENTITY OF ORGANIZATIONS

5.1 The socio-psychological perspective: Organizational or corporate identity?

The literature that focuses on the identity of organizations tends to be divided into two areas (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Firstly, research into 'corporate identity' tends to be concerned with reputation, image and branding, or the visual display or presentation of an organization to the wider world (Olins, 1989). Secondly, there are studies that are more concerned with the identity of an organization in terms of how it is constructed and understood by its members (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). This is generally termed 'organizational identity'. For the purpose of this research, the underlying concerns and assumptions from the organizational identity literature, as opposed to the corporate identity literature, occupy a central position. The idea, however, that the corporate and organizational identity or the external and internal aspects of the identity of organizations should be considered together is important (Rindova & Schultz, 1998). This is because in the types of organizations in which we are interested for this research (a knowledge intensive marketing agency) members are concerned not only with the identity of their

own organization, but also with developing and expressing the corporate identity of other organizations. For marketing agency employees, the identity of their employing organization depends on their ability to achieve success in interpreting and displaying the identity or image of their clients.

It is widely accepted that the term ‘organizational identity’ originated in 1985 with Albert and Whetten’s definition of that which is understood to be central, enduring and distinctive about an organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Organizational identity, like individual identity, can be seen as a social-psychological concept, which involves figuring out who *we* are, and what *we* stand for, as an organization in relation to *them* (as opposed to who I am in relation to you) (Gioia, 1998).

5.2 The identity of organizations is multi-faceted and changing

It is important to highlight that Albert and Whetten’s (1985) definition, although providing the catalyst in generating interest in the term organizational identity, has been the subject of criticism and reinterpretation since its inception. It has been argued, for example, that organizational identity is relatively fluid and unstable (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), and not as enduring as Albert and Whetten’s (1985) original definition indicated (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). The fluidity and flexibility of organizational identity has been understood in terms of ‘adaptive instability’ (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000) which argues that organizational identity is relatively dynamic and that although the labels associated with what members believe to be an organization’s central and enduring characteristics may remain stable, the meanings associated with these are mutable. Furthermore, Gioia et al (2000) argue that ‘the instability of identity arises mainly from its ongoing interrelationships with organizational image, which are clearly characterised by a notable degree of fluidity’ and ‘that the instability of identity is actually adaptive in facilitating organizational change in response to environmental demands’ (2000: 64). These authors take the view that in today’s increasingly turbulent environment, ‘organizations must learn to change and yet somehow stay the same...’ and that ‘existence within this paradox is possible and that, in fact, organizations can accomplish change despite implied threats to the ostensibly enduring nature of their identities’ (Gioia et al, 2000; 64).

A potential drawback when considering collective level identities is that one might assume that an organization can act as a unified unit, projecting a unified image/identity. It is argued here that the study of identity of organizations, especially in knowledge intensive settings, needs to take account that any collective, even if they share a widely recognised or accepted social identity, such as a department or profession, will have multiple views, beliefs, images, and relationships with others. This is where more discursive approaches can help to shift the emphasis of attention to more dynamic and multiple views of collective identities.

5.3 The discursive perspective

As well as the departures by those working in more socio-psychological traditions cited above, Albert and Whetten's (1985) definition may be deemed unacceptable to those who approach the topic of identity from a more discursive perspective. In order to continue to build an integrated approach, an alternative definition of organizational identity is suggested:

‘organizations’ identities are constituted by the identity-relevant narratives that their participants author about them. Identity relevant narratives are stories about organizations that actors author in their efforts to understand, or make sense of, the collective identities with which they identify’ (Brown, 2006; 734)

According to this definition an organization's identity is as multiple or numerous as the individuals who take part in talking about, writing about, or engaging in any kind of authoring or narrating of stories that involve trying to make sense of the identity of the organization. Conceiving of organizations' identities in this way highlights the potential for identity to be both multiple (different stories authored by different people in different ways) and shared (common understandings of themes and storylines between people). It also means that identity can be seen to have qualities of continuity as story threads weave their way through organizational life, as well as qualities of change and mutability as stories evolve, develop, end, and as new stories begin (Brown, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002b). This approach also recognises that people throughout an organization, not just those in the most senior positions,

‘can draw on a broad range of discursive resources in authoring versions of themselves and their organizations’ (Brown, 2006: 736). This means that even the most junior employee has a role to play in defining and displaying identity at work. This is an especially important consideration in the type of organization of interest as many interact frequently with employees from other organizations, providing them with the potential to influence, and be influenced by factors outside the boundaries of their own organization – such as their clients.

A narrative approach to collective identities suggests that they are discursive and constitutive of organizations and that the enduring or fluctuating nature of identity is a matter for empirical exploration (Brown, 2006). This approach highlights the importance of language and power in organizations and implies that ‘plurivocity’ in organizations is not necessarily something to ‘managed out’, and that a sense of ‘identity-pluralism (requisite variety)’ can be useful to organizations within fast changing environments (Brown, 2006) and unavoidable in organizations with pervasive client relations and permeable boundaries.

In a similar way that the identity at work literature at the individual level suggests the need to find a way to view identity as a framework and a process, at the organizational level, one of the key challenges revolves around finding a balance between stability and fluidity in organizational identity (Gioia, 1998). An integrated approach is one way to seek this balance. In the next section I further illuminate some of the characteristics of the kinds of organizations in relation to which an integrated approach is particularly helpful.

SECTION SIX – IDENTITY IN KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS

6.1 Identity in knowledge intensive workplace settings

Issues of identity are especially important in the context of certain types of organizations, of which the organization studied for this research is an example. The type of organization is defined as knowledge intensive, with pervasive client relations. It must be borne in mind that ‘knowledge intensive’ is a socially constructed concept

and therefore not possible to define as a category in absolute or objective terms (Alvesson, 2000). It is, however, possible to outline characteristics that are indicative of this type of organization and suggest that there is a distinction between ‘many professional service and high tech companies on the one hand, and more routinized service and industry companies on the other’ (Alvesson, 2000:1103). Although there is some overlap between the two, knowledge intensive firms and professional organizations are defined differently. Whereas the category of professional firm tends to suggest features such as ‘code of ethics, standardized education and criteria for certification, a strong professional association, monopolization of a particular labour market through the regulation of entry’ (Alvesson, 2001; 864), knowledge intensive firms such as advertising/marketing agencies and management consultancies for example may not be as highly regulated. Furthermore, the ‘common knowledge base and its significance for the identities of professionals typically reduce variation between [professional] organizations, while other knowledge-intensive organizations may have a more organizationally specific knowledge base and be more idiosyncratic (Morris & Empson, 1998; Robertson et al., 1999)’ (Alvesson, 2001; 864).

6.1.1 Work and people in knowledge intensive organizational settings

Knowledge intensive organizations can be defined according to the type of work in which the majority of its employees are engaged, for example ‘primarily intellectual’, or ‘[drawing] on mental abilities rather than physical strength or manual craft’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). They have also been defined according to the types of people employed there, for example motivated and self-driven (Alvesson, 2000) and ‘highly qualified people’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). The success of such organizations is understood to be reliant upon its people bringing their knowledge, experience and intellectual capabilities to bear in the course of their work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). There is also an element of distinction in how the work and people are managed in terms of a need for extensive communication and for eschewing traditional bureaucratic principles and organizational hierarchies (Alvesson, 2000). This is an over simplification as these kinds of organizations can still appear relatively structured and bureaucratic as well as exhibit characteristics of a more anti-bureaucratic approach to work (Alvesson, 1994). It is maintained, however, that even when rules and regulations appear relatively fixed, identity is an issue ‘due

to the presence of multiple, competing identities and the space for employees to act based on their own understanding' (Alvesson, 2000: 1102).

6.1.2 Ambiguity and decentralised power

Knowledge intensive organizations are often described as having ambiguous qualities.

'many knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) score high on ambiguity due to difficulties in assessing processes dealing with complex problems in which professional knowledge is central and due to complicated authority relationships' (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 962).

Ambiguity leads to an organizational setting that can be described as incoherent, contradictory, confused and fragmented, where it is difficult to provide feedback on work because the work itself is complex and difficult to evaluate (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). They also tend to be defined in such a way that power is decentralised. Highly trained or experienced knowledge workers are given space and freedom to do their work because 'managers know less of what goes on than those large groups of employees holding esoteric expertise' (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 965). These knowledge workers are defined as 'independent and self-governing' (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

6.1.3 Client relations

A further point to be made is the importance and pervasiveness of the relationship with clients (Swart & Kinnie, 2003). It is discussed here because it is relevant to the organization upon which this study is based. A sense of belonging and identification with the client has been identified as a potential source of conflict in service-based knowledge intensive organizations, a particular risk 'where interaction with the client is a major part of the work' and when 'they deal with complex problems involving lasting and multifaceted interaction with clients' (Alvesson, 2000; 1109). This is a key theme picked up by the current study in terms of understanding how this potential conflict of identification may also be a way for employees to gain job satisfaction and variety in their work.

6.1.4 Social identities in knowledge intensive organizational settings

The importance of the concept of social identity in knowledge intensive organizations was highlighted by Alvesson (2000) in his study on the issues of loyalty in this kind of organization. His study suggested that it may be possible, and even beneficial for management to ‘disarm/neutralise’ competing social identifications to ‘safeguard the “right” identity in order to attain loyalty’. A more recent study suggests that it is possible for employees to maintain multiple, competing identities and that for a diversity-based organizational identity where ‘*task-related* differences between team members in knowledge, skills and abilities’ (Rink & Ellemers, 2007: S17) can be favourable and have positive results for the organization. The more recent reading finds support in the study in hand.

6.1.5 Identity work in knowledge intensive organizational settings

The importance of the concept of identity work in knowledge intensive organizations has been highlighted in many studies (Alvesson, 1994; 1998; 2000; Lilley, 1997; Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Karreman & Alvesson, 2004). The identity work concept lends itself well to studying organizations in periods of change (Beech & Johnson, 2005), and in contexts where identity itself is perceived to be changing (Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004), ambiguous (Thomas & Linstead, 2002), or being constructed (Beech, 2006; Beech & Huxham, 2003). In the context of this particular study the concept of identity work is applied as part of the integrated approach in the context of everyday work within a knowledge intensive organizational setting.

6.2 Marketing agencies: A brief note

A brief discussion is offered which relates specifically to the particular type of knowledge intensive organization of interest, that of a marketing agency. For the purpose of this research, ‘marketing’ and ‘advertising’ agencies are assumed to be similar to one another in terms of their organizational set up, relationships with clients, and daily challenges faced by their employees. Of course there are differences, for instance in terms of the media with which they tend to work, and

marketing industry specific debates abound around how agencies structure themselves in relation to marketing channels and client needs (Waller, 2004). To be clear, this debate is outside the scope of this research.

As discussed above, knowledge intensive work is ambiguous work. This is especially the case with creative work such as that undertaken by marketing and advertising agencies (Alvesson, 1998). Qualifications are not mandatory; work results are subjective, (although the effects of marketing and creative work in advertising is subject to serious scrutiny and research in terms of results); clients will often dispute the suggestions put forward by their agency, and believing that they could do the job themselves, reject proposals (Alvesson, 1998). This ambiguousness, and what can be perceived as a negative perception toward ‘advertising people’ can lead to insecurities and to questions of identity becoming salient (Alvesson, 1998).

It is suggested that marketing ‘professionals’ may have to fight to enjoy the benefits of formalised professional status. Although the marketing industry has professional bodies and associations, such as the Direct Marketing Association, and people who work in the field of marketing are very often expected to pass formal examinations in their specific field of marketing, as a ‘profession’ marketing does not enjoy the same status as the traditional professions such as accounting and medicine. Many who work in marketing are frequently having to ‘prove’ themselves and their work. In other words, they strive, and sometimes even struggle, to be recognised as professionals who bring their knowledge, intellect, and experience to bear in order to do their work.

This study also pays attention to cross-organizational boundary identity issues, rather than being constrained by the boundaries of a single organization that is an important factor in many knowledge intensive organizational settings. Cross boundary research related to identity has been identified as an under researched area (Beech & Huxham, 2003). As pointed out by Grimshaw et al. (2005), in terms of understanding contemporary workplaces, studying a single organizational unit has some serious limitations in terms of understanding the challenges faced by employees of contemporary organizations due to the permeated and permeable nature of the boundaries, and embeddedness in networks, of many contemporary organizations.

The data related to the inter-organizational relationships and issues of identity are presented in chapter six of this thesis.

6.3 Defining the need for a integrated approach

In existing research it has been suggested, that whilst more discursive approaches offer alternatives to the ‘organization as machine’ or ‘organization as bureaucracy’ metaphors, it can be seen as merely replacing them with an alternative stereotype, ‘that organizations are becoming increasingly network based, organic, and flexible, and mainly knit together through bonds in the imaginary realm: values, ideas, mutual adjustment, community feelings or identity’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 163). Furthermore, in complex organizations, ‘the *prevalence of social categories suggests* that social identities are likely to represent a significant component of individuals’ organizationally situated self-definition’ (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; emphasis added). It is therefore suggested that, if the social identities with which people identify are important to people working in these kinds of organizations, they should be given due attention by those who study these kinds of organizations.

By approaching this study from an integrated perspective, the research in hand seeks out the implications of viewing multiple identities as both a struggle, which could represent issues regarding loyalty, and also as a resource for getting the job done, and in some instances, as a potential way to generate loyalty. This study also highlights that whilst it is crucial to recognise the processual, multiple, anti-bureaucratic, ambiguous nature of these kinds of organizations, there are also bureaucratic, hierarchical frameworks, and strong social identifications at play which affect individual’s experience of work (Hackley, 2000).

In addition to the myriad of within-organizational boundary potential identifications, such as workgroup, team, department, division and workplace, there is also the potential to identify with the client (Alvesson, 2000; Swart, Kinnie and Purcell, 2003). As the focus of Alvesson’s 2000 study was on issues of loyalty and exit, the emphasis and assumptions around the issue of multiple identities was seen in somewhat negative terms, especially related to the potential impact on the employing

organization in terms of losing their staff, or having to manage confused staff. By asking instead what the role of identity is in this kind of organization, and exploring this question from an integrated perspective, it is possible to identify some of the more positive outcomes of multiple identifications.

SECTION SEVEN – TOWARD AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

7.1 Not either/or...

The above discussion should leave no doubt that the study of identity at work is important and that developing understanding of the role of identity in knowledge intensive organizational settings is particularly valuable. These organizations are complex, highly reliant on the employees' engagement with work to succeed, and rife with identity related issues. What is not so clear, however, is from which perspective one should approach the study of identity at work in relation to contemporary work organizations, especially when the interest lies in the everyday work context at multiple levels of analysis.

On the one hand there are socio-psychological approaches, which tend to suggest that people construct themselves as having a relatively stable set of characteristics, which they attempt to affirm over time through interaction and although this view has been much developed in recent years, the emphasis tends to be on structure and the strength of identification, or the outcomes of the identity processes. On the other hand, there are more narrative or discursive approaches which emphasize the fluid, continuously emerging side of identity, and reject entirely essentialist notions of identity (Alvesson, 2000; Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

It is argued here that due to the complex role of identity within knowledge intensive organizational settings, a perspective on identity at work is needed which takes into account the relatively well defined groups and teams with which people associate themselves, or with which they identify in the workplace (such as their team, department, and workplace), together with the more fluid, flexible and processual elements of identity highlighted by more discursive approaches. It is argued that this integrated approach provides the necessary underpinning to recognise the fluid,

processual nature of identity that creates the daily struggle of working for one's identity in the face of competing demands and conflicting goals. It also enables us to see that from time to time there are pauses in the identity process and that at such times a social identity can be used as a guiding framework for action (Bartunek, 2003; Alvesson, 2000).

In the kinds of organizations discussed, there is scope for individuals to use identity work to bend and shape an organized and well defined symbolically constructed social identity framework, and that this paradox of a 'fluid identity framework' is utilised by individuals to help them cope with their work and with the multiple and complex relationships they have to manage as part of their work. It is put forward, in the final section of this chapter, that this seemingly contradictory understanding of identity, that it is both structured/ordered and dynamic/processual, is a useful conceptualisation of identity that can bring insight into the role of identity at work.

7.2 ...both/and

An approach to the study of identity in these kinds of organizations needs to contain the requisite variety (Ashby, 1962), or match the organization in terms of complexity, and even paradox. I argue that this requisite variety can be achieved by drawing together elements from the socio-psychological and discursive approaches outlined above, to reach an integrated approach capable of providing new insight, particularly in relation to rapidly changing, knowledge intensive, and client dominated organizational settings.

Pointed out by Sveningsson and Alvesson:

'there is a tendency to put two extremes against each other among the more 'progressive' (postmodernist) authors: either identity is fixed and stable – an essence, 'being' – or it is fluid, uncertain – in movement, 'becoming' or radically decentred' (2003: 1167).

It is argued that what is required is finding ways to put these two extremes together, rather than against each other.

Karreman and Alvesson suggest a ‘third direction’ to balance these two extremes, or clichés, as they put it. This view is that within organizational contexts ‘*both structural and imaginary* aspects are elaborate and consequential’ (2004: 163, emphasis added) and that within knowledge intensive firms in particular ‘rather than viewing the imaginary, such as organizational and social identities and organizational cultures, as additional or a separate extension to the substantive/structural/material dimension, socio-ideological and technocratic forms of control build upon and feed each other in these kind of companies’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 164).

I argue that making use of the identity work and social identity concepts, thus focusing on the processes of *creating* and *acting from* social identities – this research adds an important dimension to understanding the role of identity in the workplace. It provides a way of viewing identity as both a process (creating, moving between), and an outcome (a platform from which to act/make sense). It is an attempt to develop and use a ‘third direction’, defined as a conceptual bridge between the two approaches, which helps to bring insight into the role of identity in organizational setting studied.

In the next chapter I outline how this is methodologically possible and demonstrate the empirical need and advantages of doing so in chapters five and six.

Chapter Three: Methodology and method

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

This research develops and uses an integrated theoretical perspective to approach the study of identity at work in order to achieve a greater understanding and provide insight into the role of identity within the context of the ‘everyday’ work experience for people working in knowledge intensive work settings. It is argued that as contemporary organizations become increasingly complex, due to, for example, high levels of ambiguity in knowledge work, and complex inter- and intra- organizational relationships, it becomes more important to explore and try to understand the complex role of identity in these kinds of organizations. The previous chapter outlined the theoretical perspective taken, and considered its position relative to existing literature. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methods adopted to undertake the research, and outline the methodological stance used to underpin the entire project.

Developing and using an integrated perspective by juxtaposing the discursive concept of identity work with the socio-psychological concept of social identity posed certain methodological challenges. The underpinning methodology had to provide sufficient flexibility to enable identity to be viewed simultaneously as both a process/struggle and an outcome/resource, yet be robust enough to hold the emergent and grounded research strategy adopted. Furthermore, as methodology guides methods, it also had to provide the practical ‘tools’ with which to gather and analyse data commensurate with undertaking cross-organizational boundary, multi-level, in-depth organizational research.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology used; demonstrate how it provides links between the data, the key concepts, and the methods employed; and discuss how it provides the required robust flexibility to be able to develop and

employ an integrated view of identity. In order to achieve this purpose, this chapter will:

- 1) Explore and demonstrate how a broadly symbolic interactionist perspective is relevant to the study of the role of identity within knowledge intensive organizations, especially one that aims to emphasize the complexity of identity in these kinds of organizations. With particular reference to Mead's (1934) concepts of the 'I' and 'me', discuss why this methodology can be used to underpin the view that identity is both a process/struggle and an outcome/resource.
- 2) Demonstrate how the concepts of social identity and identity work can be considered within the same study due to their methodological similarities (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) to create a synthesized coherence (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) that can help to provide insight into the role of identity in knowledge intensive settings.
- 3) Describe and evaluate the methods adopted for data collection and analysis.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

The section following this one describes the methodological underpinning and discusses the merits of a broadly symbolic interactionist perspective for the research in hand. Section three outlines the research design. The fourth section discusses the methods of data collection with the fifth section providing a chronological account of the data collection period. Section six outlines the methods of data analysis and discusses how the research strategy adopted resulted in an integrated perspective being proposed.

SECTION TWO - METHODOLOGY

2.1 Symbolic interactionism as a methodological underpinning

Methodology refers to 'the principles that underlie and guide the full process of studying the obdurate character of the given empirical world' (Blumer, 1969: 23). Put another way, it is one's 'way of thinking about and studying social reality' (Strauss

and Corbin, 1998: 3). The methodology for this research is broadly that of symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Herbert Blumer (1969). This school of thought grew from the work and teachings of a group of scholars from the Chicago School, including W. I. Thomas, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley and William James (McCall and Simmons, 1978; Barley, 1989). Their ‘sense of disenchantment with what they saw as the irrelevance of the philosophy and social science of their day to people’s every-day lived situations’ (Locke, 2001: 20) spawned a school of thought that places human beings at the centre of their created and negotiated, symbolic and meaningful worlds.

Of the scholars mentioned, Blumer (1969), in defining the methodological position of symbolic interactionism, relies chiefly on the thought of George Herbert Mead. Through identifying two forms or levels of social interaction, “the conversation of gestures” and “the use of significant symbols”, Mead ‘laid the foundations of the symbolic interactionist approach’ (Blumer, 1969: 1).

This approach centres around the three premises of symbolic interaction:

- 1) ‘Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them’
 - 2) ‘the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows’
 - 3) ‘these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’
- (Blumer, 1969: 2).

The following quote, taken from Mangham (1978), captures Mead and colleagues’ assumptions about human beings and the nature of social reality:

‘Man, as a social actor, can take account of the present in light of his past experience and the anticipated future through the medium of symbols. By reference to such symbolic representations of past and future states he can, and does, orient his behaviour. Unlike matter, he does not simply behave in response to stimuli; he constructs a meaning for that with which he is

confronted and behaves in accordance with the meaning so ascribed.’
(Mangham, 1978: 14)

2.2 The nature of reality and the mutually influencing role of the individual and the collective

Symbolic interactionists assume that reality is socially constructed through social interaction and that ‘knowledge of social worlds must entail an understanding of how members construe the problems they face’ (Barley, 1989: 42). This approach assumes that reality is symbolically and collectively negotiated in processes of definition and redefinition between social actors and only by trying to understand the processes of defining, and the resulting definitions is it possible to comprehend social reality. Processes of defining are achieved in ‘interaction between people’ (Blumer, 1969: 8). Mead (1934) held that individuals act toward symbols of perceived intended behaviour by others. The way in which individuals or groups interact, and act toward yet to be defined ‘objects’, imbues these objects with meaning, thus social reality is not only defined, but also created through interaction (Mead, 1934).

Individuals and groups both influence and are influenced by the social constructions that order their world. In the main, however, ‘it is the social processes in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life’ (Blumer, 1969: 19). As Mangham proposes: ‘I am influenced by the repertoire of meanings and behaviour which have accrued around the office of managing director, but I can also influence and extend the repertoire either by accident, ignorance, or design’ (1978: 15). In this sense, social reality is negotiated between actors in processes of symbolic interaction, and the relationship between human action and social order is circular, reciprocal, or mutually influenced. The culmination of this view is that reality, or all social constructions brought forth through the actions and interactions of actors, influence subsequent actions and interactions of actors. As asserted by Clifford Geertz ‘man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun’ (1975).

2.3 Implications for research

Central to the symbolic interactionist school of thought is interaction, meaning making and interpretation. Blumer (1969) argued for the unique status of subject as meaning maker, or human being as actor. This emphasis on the symbolic and social character of human thought and action means that one has to understand the meaning of objects, as created in social interaction, in order to understand behaviour. The importance and emphasis on conducting fieldwork and gathering empirical data must not be underestimated in order that the researcher is able to explore ‘what’s going on’ from the point of view of the research participants. As contended by Blumer ‘the road to empirical validation...lies in the examination of the empirical world’ (1969: 34). A key feature, therefore, of any research underpinned by symbolic interactionist view is the empirical data, getting into the field, and understanding the *meanings of* the socially constructed world of those being studied, from their own point of view.

This approach, which advocates a “‘get out and do it’ perspective’ (Punch, 1994: 84) is suited to ‘exploring complex social realities’ (Punch, 1994: 84), and therefore, I would argue, suited to the study of identity in complex, knowledge intensive organizations. Symbolic interactionism is also particularly suited to the study of identity and its close relations, ‘self’ and ‘image’. The next part of the chapter explores in more detail the methodological implications of a symbolic interactionist perspective in relation to the study of identity.

2.4 Symbolic interactionism and identity

Reality is constructed as the meaning of ‘things’, or the defining of ‘social objects’, is undertaken by individuals interacting with one another and their interpretations of social reality. It is important to note that ‘*the basic “thing” to be identified in any situation is the person himself*’ (McCall & Simmons, 1978: 59) because the defining of social objects will always be in relation to the individual doing the defining. Concepts such as self and identity, are therefore of importance within a symbolic interactionist methodology. From a symbolic interactionist perspective identity is defined as:

‘the set of beliefs or meanings that answer the question, “Who am I?” (Mead, 1934) or in the case of an organization ‘who are we?’’ (Foreman and Whetten, 2002: 618).

This definition, in the form of a question that requires an answer, highlights a key feature of identity. It is created through interaction. It therefore follows that, as with all social constructions, identity is created, maintained and changed in symbolic interaction and processes of negotiation between actors. The answers to the question, ‘who am I?’ are developed between people and may change over time and in different situations. As well as being mutable, identity is also understood to be multiple:

‘People have multiple identities (Mead 1934, Feldman 1979, Thoits 1983).’
(Foreman & Whetten, 2002: 618)

‘the idea that individuals have multiple identities is one of the cornerstones of symbolic interactionist thought.’ (Feldman, 1979: 399)

From a symbolic interactionist perspective identity is a socio-psychological construct. It is both the individual mind and the perceived socio-environmental factors that must intersect in order to create what becomes known as the self. The terms self and identity are both important within a symbolic interactionist approach. A brief definition of the relationship between them, as they are understood and used within the context of this research is offered next.

2.5 The relationship between self and identity

Blumer defines Meads’ conception of self as follows:

‘In asserting that the human being has a self, Mead simply meant that the human being is an object to himself. The human being may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward

himself. As these types of behaviour imply, the human being may become the object of his own action' (Blumer, 1969: 62).

In other words, in the same way that the meaning of objects and others are created in social interaction, so individuals come to know a sense of their own being, or 'self' through social interaction. Blumer stresses that 'Mead saw the self as a process and not as a structure' (1969: 62) and defines the interaction with the self as an 'internal mechanism that is used in forming and guiding his conduct' (Blumer, 1969: 62). The view is taken, for the purpose of this research, that 'identity' is a combination of the unique and individual characteristics, beliefs, experiences, and values, which, together with one's social identifications, as discussed in chapter two, characterise or define the 'self' toward which an individual acts when he is acting toward himself. It must be stressed, however, that because defining the self is a reflexive process, the combination of characteristics, beliefs, experiences, and social identifications, and how they are interpreted by the social individual, are constantly evolving and changing. If one was to take a snap shot or a single moment in time view, then the self and its identity may appear organized and structured. If one takes a longitudinal view, the process self and the dynamic nature of identity become clearer. When a person answers the question 'who are you?' he is engaged in defining the identity of the self.

2.6 Symbolic interactionism and an integrated approach

Symbolic interactionism provides an overarching view of social reality which guides the methodology of the research. Within the current study it also provides an underpinning conceptual foundation for an integrated approach to the study of identity. This foundation is the Meadian assumption about the nature and creation of the self, a process reliant on individual agency as well as social constraints.

The notion that identity can be in the process of 'becoming', with varying degrees of ease or struggle, whilst also being a concept that defines a social entity in a state of 'being' (as a product or outcome of a process) that can be used as a resource by those

who have created it, is captured in Mead's conception of the 'I' and the 'Me' and the relationship between them:

'Self-consciousness and reflexion by the Me are only one side of, or one stage in, the process of self-knowledge, while agency, or the I, is the other stage. In Mead (1934), such a process is to be understood as follows. The I is the experiencer, the agent. While actually experiencing and being involved in the world, the I is unable to reflect and evaluate. It is when the act has passed that one looks at it and interprets it. In other words, the I becomes Me. As Mead puts it:

'We can go back directly a few moments in our experience and then we are dependent upon memory images for the rest. So that the 'I' in memory is the spokesman of the self of the second, or minute, or day ago. As given, it is a 'me' which was the 'I' at the earlier time (Mead, 1934, p. 174)' (Markova, 1987: 70).

Relating Mead's notion of the 'I' and the 'me' to the thesis in hand, the two aspects of identity are highlighted. The 'I' relates to that part of identity in a state of becoming, whereas the 'me' relates to that part of identity in a state of being, capable of retrospect and answering the question 'who am I?' by looking back at the actions of the I. The relationship between them is a cyclical alternation between the two, over time. The 'I' is the ongoing struggle, the 'me' comes into play during pauses, moments of reflection and retrospect in the on-going process of identity creation.

From Markova's interpretation of Mead it may be said that a person is able to know herself because she is able to look back at her actions in an interaction with self. In this sense, symbolic interactionism provides that identity is what we know and understand about our selves through cycles of acting and reflecting on what we experience to be 'I'. In this sense the pauses in the identity creation process are reflective interaction thus 'the process of knowing is never ending and inexhaustible' (Markova, 1987: 69). In other words, despite being able to take a moment to reflect upon who or what we are as a social entity, the process of becoming, or the emergent element of identity continues. In this way, Mead's concept brings into focus a paradox of the integrated perspective – that identity is simultaneously a process and

an outcome, a struggle, and a resource. Distinguishing between these two states is a matter of individuals positioning themselves within an interaction and the passage of time.

2.7 Defining methodological linkages between socio-psychological approaches and discursive approaches

Mead's concept of the I and the me, together with the theoretical linkages between socio-psychological and more discursive approaches used in this study, specifically between the concepts of identity work and social identities, outlined in the previous chapter, provide conceptual and theoretical building blocks for an integrated approach. These linkages also rest on methodological arguments. It is therefore important to outline the methodological similarities apparent between the two approaches. This is done using Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework of assumptions about social science. In undertaking this exercise the underlying values and biases within the two theoretical perspectives are examined.

'These values and biases act as assumptions, taken for granted, in the world views that guide theorizing, and they constitute paradigms that channel attention in specific directions and preclude the investigation of alternative theoretical, ideological, and practical spheres' (Astley & Van de Ven; 1983: 270).

By uncovering these assumptions it is possible to point to shared or comparable assumptions between the two approaches regarding ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

It is proposed that, ontologically, socio-psychological and more discursive approaches share assumptions about the 'essence of the phenomena under investigation' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 1). Both hold that reality is socially constructed via the negotiations of social beings who attribute meaning to the world around them. This is in contrast to a positivist or realist approach, for example, which is underpinned by the assumption that reality is external to the individual, imposing itself on individual consciousness. Although diverse, the concepts and theories defined in the previous

chapter are on the same paradigmatic spectrum. Reality is subjective, rather than objective, and it is socially constructed, rather than something tangible, given, or 'out there'.

In epistemological terms, relating to 'assumptions about the grounds of knowledge' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 1), the two approaches fall within same spectrum. Neither socio-psychological assumptions, nor discursive ones suggest that knowledge is hard, tangible, transferable, or categorically 'true' or 'false'. They align with one another in assuming that knowledge is softer, subjective, and uniquely created by individual experience and insight. Neither approach is concerned with 'searching for regularities and causal relationships between the constituent elements of the social world' (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 5). Rather, the social world 'can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied' (Burrell & Morgan, 1979:5).

In assumptions about human nature and 'in particular, the relationship between human beings and their environment,' once again it is possible to identify similarities in terms of where each approach sits on a continuum of voluntarism to determinism. It might be argued that the initial conception of social identity may be considered somewhat structured and deterministic in that 'human beings and their experiences are regarded as products of the environment' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 2). This thesis argues, however, that with the extensions of self-categorisation theory (Hogg and Terry, 2000) and the interactionist perspective (McCall and Simmons, 1978) as discussed in the previous chapter, and underpinned by a symbolic interactionist approach, both the socio-psychological and discursive approaches emphasize voluntarism and agency over structure. In this sense, 'man is regarded as the creator of his environment, the controller as opposed to the controlled' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 2).

The fact that the theoretical approaches sit on the same side of Burrell and Morgan's dichotomy suggests that they are methodologically commensurable and can be utilised within the same study. Neither assumes that social reality is like the reality of the 'natural sciences': hard, external, objective. Instead, both advocate an 'alternative view of social reality, which stresses the importance of the subjective experience of

individuals in the creation of the social world' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 4). In this sense, the shared concern of both approaches is in people creating, modifying and interpreting their worlds. It is understood that it is in *how* this question should be answered, and how language itself is perceived (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), that the two approaches differ. A symbolic interactionist methodology is suited to accommodating this difference. This is because language can be seen as a symbolic resource to be interpreted and thus in part, constitutes and not just represents reality.

Burrell and Morgan's framework of assumptions provides a methodological building block in creating an integrated view of identity. This framework supports the claim that the approaches identified can co-exist in the same study. It has also provided a 'synthesized coherence' within the research because it 'draw[s] connections between works and investigate[s] streams not typically cited together to suggest the existence of undeveloped research areas' (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1030).

The undeveloped research area is in understanding identity as both a framework that guides and influences action (resource/outcome) as well as an ongoing struggle/process in knowledge intensive, ambiguous work settings in which organizational members seek to achieve and make use of work-related identities that are continuously subject to competing identifications.

A further argument put forward is that not only is there a possibility of the different approaches being drawn from in the same study, but that there is a need to do so, especially when seeking to understand identity in knowledge intensive, complex, rapidly changing, inter-organizational contexts. This argument is demonstrated within chapters five and six, drawing from the data collected during this research.

Having set out the methodological underpinning of the research the next part of this chapter considers the practical implications for the research, such as suitable research design and research methods.

SECTION THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Type of research: from data to theory and back to data

This research began inductively, whereby data was gathered not with the view of testing a priori theory but with a view to exploring the processes within a particular organizational setting. The ideas and interpretations generated from the data collected during the initial stages of the research were held up against established theories, thus achieving an iterative cycling between data collection, existing theory, and emerging ideas. Questions and ideas generated from cycling between the data and literature were taken back to the field, where further inductive, but more focused data collection and theorizing took place. A more detailed explanation of the data analysis methods undertaken throughout the research is provided in the final section of this chapter.

3.2 Case study inspired

Case studies can be used effectively when research is concerned with contemporary events within a real life context and when there is a ‘desire to understand complex social phenomena’ (Yin, 1994: 3). The advantages of doing this type of research is that it ‘allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events’ (Yin, 1994: 3). Strictly speaking, this research is not a ‘case study’ as the ‘case’ itself is not the focus of interest in its own right (Bryman, 2004). It does, however, contain features in common with case study research, as it has been concerned with intensive examination of a particular setting in an attempt to understand complex social phenomena, in context (Bryman, 2004). In some ways it can be understood as an ‘instrumental case study’ whereby ‘a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue’ and the case itself plays a supporting role by facilitating our understanding of something else (Stake, 2000: 437).

The particular setting, or case, is a team of people working for a marketing agency on a client account; the complex social phenomena, or issue into which insight is provided, is that of the role of identity in this setting; and the context is that of a knowledge intensive organizational setting. The research has paid attention to the research participants’ day-to-day activity, the context in which they carry out their

work, their intra- and inter-organizational relations and the part played by identity within this setting.

Despite the research not qualifying as a case study in the strictest sense, it is useful to pursue the definition in order to emphasize the importance of the context of the research setting to the insights provided. As well as being an instrumental case, it is also suggested that the research setting offers both an exemplifying and to some extent even 'extreme case' (Pratt, 2000) with which to explore the role of identity at work. This can be suggested because it provides particularly relevant or fertile ground with which to explore a particular topic. It is argued that the current research is an extreme case with which to study identity at work because:

- a) the purpose of the team being studied is to understand the identity, communicate and sometimes even shape and build the image of another organization and its products/brands;
- b) the organization in question, 'Agency', was experiencing a period of significant change with regards to organizational identity, following a merger, name change and change in status from a head office function to a regional office. Arguably, research participants were in a period of intensive sensemaking in relation to some step-changes to their work-related identities;
- c) the sector of marketing/advertising agencies generally operate in client-agency partnerships (Waller, 2004). This makes this setting an effective context in which to explore the identity related issues of cross-organizational working that exist in these types of organizations, and are becoming important in many more contemporary work settings.

In many studies of this nature it would be point (b) above that is emphasised as important in further understanding of identity in organizations. It is, however, point (a) I wish to emphasize. Due to the nature of their work, Agency employees involved in the research expressed conscious awareness of the identity processes, which they instigated and took part in. This relates to both learning and communicating the identity of their client, and their own organization, and in manipulating their own identities in order to do what they do.

Although case studies can be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two (Bryman, 2004), the data collected for this research has been entirely qualitative. This research strategy was deemed appropriate due to the exploratory, inductive nature of the research and the interpretive slant of its methodological underpinning. As well as its overriding qualitative strategy, within the broad case study design of the research, several methodological guiding principles, generated from a symbolic interactionist position, have been adhered to. These are discussed next.

3.3 Grounded and concerned with the every-day experience of work from the research participants point of view

People attribute meaning to the world around them and act according their perceptions of the world. This view, driven by a symbolic interactionist ontology and epistemology, has certain implications for the craft of doing research:

‘...Thomas gave priority to the researcher’s ability to comprehend how members of a social group construe their lives. “If men define situations as real,” he wrote, “they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572)’ quoted in Barley (1989: 43).

It is therefore argued that research which is carried out into how or why people do what they do, must be grounded in the social constructions of the research subjects, and efforts must be made to view the world through the eyes of the people being studied. In other words, the researcher must make an interpretation of the research setting and what is going on there, but as far as possible, that interpretation must be made within the research participants’ own ‘terms’.

In order to understand, therefore, how individuals in the research setting create and use their work-based identities, it was important to spend time with the research participants, getting to know them, and the world according to them. Although it is often considered appropriate to undertake participant observation in order to get to know the subjects well enough to understand the world in their terms (Punch, 1994), for this particular research this was neither possible nor preferable, as it would have

undermined the multi-perspective advantage. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.5 below. The deep understanding of the research participants was gleaned through frequent visits to the research setting, shadowing the research participants, and demonstrating genuine interest in them and their work. The practicalities of what this entailed is discussed further in sections four and five below.

Although this research is described as grounded, it is important to make the distinction between a grounded approach and pure ‘grounded theory method’ (Glaser & Strauss; 1967). A grounded approach is one whereby the researcher is interested in the ‘empirical world’ or:

‘the minute-by-minute, day-to-day social life of individuals as they act together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in ‘joint action’ and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances (Woods, 1992: 348)’ quoted in (Locke, 2001: 24).

Grounded theory method, however, is a specific and systematic way to approach grounded research with a view to generating theory. The current research cannot be described thus because principles such as theoretical saturation have not been adhered to. It can, however, be described as a grounded approach as it paid close attention to the day-to-day life of a group of individuals, as they interacted within the context of their day everyday work lives, in order to create and make sense of a particular aspect of their world.

3.4 Longitudinal: the necessity and messiness of process data

Conducting the research over a period of time was vital in being able to explore the processual, or dynamic aspect of identity. Process data are ‘events, activities and choices, ordered over time’ (Langley, 1999: 692). ‘Process data are messy’ and ‘making sense of them is a constant challenge’ (Langley, 1999: 691). This is because process data tends to consist of events, or stories about things that have happened involving thoughts, feelings, and interpretations which transcend levels of analysis

and/or have ambiguous boundaries (Langley, 1999). Further challenges are created due to the sheer volume of data that tends to be collected, which is exacerbated when an inductive approach is adopted and it can be difficult for the researcher to decide between ‘relevant’ and ‘non-relevant’ field notes, observations, interview transcripts and so on (Langley, 1999). Despite the challenges, collecting process data has been crucial in generating the insight provided by this research. It enabled me to focus on how the research participants switched between different social identities over time. I return to the specific challenges of analysing process data in the final section of this chapter.

3.5 Multi-level / multi-perspective

‘The study of organizations inherently involves more than one level’ (Rousseau, 1985: 18). This is because the establishment of organizational behaviour as a discipline in its own right incorporates the disciplines of psychology and sociology and their emphasis on the individual and collective levels respectively (Rousseau, 1985). It is argued here that adopting a multi-level, multi-perspective approach to the study of identity at work is vital in developing an integrated approach to the study of identity in knowledge intensive organizational settings. This is because organizational reality can be perceived as different depending upon from where an individual defines him or her self in any given situation, such as from a team or organizational perspective, or from different levels on the organizational hierarchy (Corley, 2004). The client relationship may be perceived differently from the different group perspectives within the organization.

Identity itself is a multi-level concept (Albert, 1998; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In a work context, it is applicable at many different levels, such as the individual; sub-group, group and multi-group, (e.g. teams, departments, professions, functions); workplace (e.g. office, factory, studio); organization, and industry. Not only is it applicable at multiple levels, it can act as bridging concept between levels (Whetten, 1998; Ashforth and Mael, 1996). Crossing levels in research is messy (Rousseau, 1985) and fraught with difficulties, such as the sheer volume of literature that may be considered relevant to the study in hand. Multi-level research is also rewarding and can be insightful.

A multi-level approach has been important in noticing how individuals shift between different levels of identity over time and in different contexts, and in noticing how a new social identity, which crosses the organizational boundary between client and supplier, is created through interaction. Both of these insights may have been precluded had the research been restricted to a single level of data collection and analysis. Furthermore, carrying out grounded research driven by the interactions of the research participants meant going with the switches, shifts, and movements between levels as defined by the research participants.

I have undertaken this research from multiple levels by collecting individual-level data (shadowing, interviewing), group level data (extended visits, work output, observing meetings), and organizational level data (newsletters, organizational stories, communication in the public domain e.g. website). This research is multi-perspective in that extended field visits into various departments within Agency were undertaken in order to try and understand the differences between those departments in terms of how individuals from those departments made sense of their organizational reality. Taking a multi-level / multi-perspective approach to the research has meant paying attention to the fine grain detail of the research setting and engaging in different methods of data collection to capture data at various levels. These different methods of data collection are explored next.

SECTION FOUR – METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

4.1 Definition

Methods are defined as a ‘set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analysing data’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 3). The following section of this chapter briefly describes the methods of data collection employed during the course of this research.

4.2 Observation

During the course of 18 months spent collecting data I observed the research participants from different vantage points, including sitting within the area where the

team sat and observing the general day-to-day work of the team as a whole; sitting with specific parts of the team (sub-groups/departments) and focusing on the day-to-day activity involved in their particular work; one-on-one shadowing of specific team members; sitting in on formal and ad-hoc meetings; and travelling with the team to various activities out of the office (including client meetings and print-proofing). I always carried a notebook with me and would usually take notes relating to what was said, done, and what I thought about what I had observed. I would tend to only take notes when it was not too conspicuous to do so, such as in meetings when most participants would also be taking notes.

It is argued that real-time observation is an important way to generate new insight on existing fields of research or areas of interest:

‘Compared with more structured methods, then, observation has the flexibility to yield insight into new realities or new ways of looking at old realities (Kidder, 1981)’ (Alder & Adler, 1994: 382)

The nature of the observations changed during the course of the research. Initial observations were broadly focused and generated descriptive notes. It was not until the second phase of the research (see section 5.3 below) that the concept of identity became a central concern and I could be more selective in terms of making choices regarding what might be relevant. Despite its strengths, observation alone attracts criticism. For example, without the research participants’ direct input, interpretation, and my ‘probing’ into their thoughts it would have been very difficult for me to claim that I had tried to see the world from their point of view. This criticism is partly overcome by adopting multi-methods because ‘observation produces especially great rigor *when combined with other methods* (Kidder, 1981)’ (Alder & Adler, 1994: 382). The other methods used are outlined next.

4.3 Unstructured, informal interviews ‘in conversation’

During the data collection period I took the opportunity to engage with research participants individually and in small groups to ask them about aspects of their job,

their work, their organization, the client, and sometimes even more abstract considerations such as debating the nature of marketing (art or science?) or generating metaphors for the different functions of the team. I describe these informal interviews as ‘in conversation’ because they tended to begin spontaneously from conversations, either between the research participants, which subsequently presented an opportunity for me to join in, or between the research participants and myself, that had potential relevance for my research project. These conversations generated rich, fragmented, subjective, interrelated and multiple identity-related accounts of their worlds by the research participants (Brown, 2006). The data generated from these were key to exploring the complexities of the organizational setting and the role of identity within it.

4.4 Semi-structured interviews

During the research period I carried out 27 semi-structured interviews covering the entire hierarchy of the team taking part in the research, from the most junior Account Manager, to the Managing Director of Agency. These semi-structured interviews provided the space where myself, the ‘interviewer’, and the research participant, ‘the interviewee’, had the opportunity to discuss, unpack and explore the observations made during the data collection, which would not have been possible during the course of a field visit. The semi-structured interviews provided me with the opportunity to test out some of my own emerging ideas, clarify my interpretation of incidents and events in order to identify and avoid misunderstanding (Bryman, 2004), and try to understand the work place setting from the point of view of the research participants.

4.5 Multi-method

The multi-method approach described above is a way to overcome the weaknesses of a single method of data collection. Observation overcomes the pitfalls of interview alone, such as relying solely on the recollections and (re)interpretations of events by the participants. Interviews overcome the pitfalls of observation alone, such as relying solely on the researcher’s interpretation of events. As well as the practical consideration of gathering data, I have given consideration to the types of data that

different methods seemed to generate. In broad terms, the observational data emphasised the ‘resource/outcome’ side of identity more clearly, whereby I often noted how the research participants engaged different perspectives during periods of sensemaking. The interview data, on the other hand, provided opportunities for the interviewee to engage in identity work. By this I mean that it was often in the more detailed conversation generated during these interviews that the research participants would appear to engage in struggles over their own professional identity, in relation to, for example, the Client or a different department within Agency. The variety of data collection methods was crucial in drawing out the different aspects of identity.

I have summarised below some of the advantages of the multi-method approach adopted:

- a) A somewhat ‘distant’ and unobtrusive start to the research, involving observation only enabled me to observe the differentiation of social identities apparent in the workplace setting
- b) Repeated field visits over a period of time enabled me to notice the different identity perspectives ‘at work’ (i.e. in action)
- c) Spending time trying to identify more fully with each department in turn enabled me to identify differences in the relationships with Client across the different departments
- d) Undertaking the research from a more immersed, participant observation method, for example, may have negated the advantage of observing differences between sub-teams and departments
- e) Some in-depth involvement once the various relatively stable social identities had been identified enabled me to explore the more complex and subtle elements of the work and relationships, for example, realising how ‘personal’ the work feels and how vulnerable one can feel when presenting one’s work. A more in-depth understanding of the Client Services department revealed a deceptive/devious element to their work
- f) Paying attention to talk and narrative enabled me to notice the more dynamic side to identity and the movement between the work-related social identities

What has been described so far is the overall approach to the research, the fieldwork and the data collection. Regarded as a whole, the research can be described in symbolic interactionist terms as ‘exploratory’. Firstly, I carried out research into a sphere of social life that was unfamiliar to me with the aim of forming ‘a close and comprehensive acquaintance’ (Blumer, 1969: 40). Secondly, I carried out the research as way of:

‘developing and sharpening [my] inquiry so that [my]...directions of inquiry, data, analytical relations, and interpretations arise out of, and remain grounded in, the empirical life under study’ (Blumer, 1969: 40).

The next part of this chapter describes the product of the fieldwork – the data.

4.6 Field notes

The data collected comprises handwritten notes taken during the field visits, which I typed up after each field visit, and artefacts collected during these visits. The notes are based on the day-to-day interactions both within and between one particular Account Team. I was able to observe and take notes in various settings such as meetings (formal and informal, at the office and away from it), presentations, and over-the-desk conversations. The notes mainly consist of the day-to-day activities, conversations, and bits of conversations the research participants had between themselves, and also with me, about their work, the Client, their own organization, and the problems and issues they felt they faced.

4.7 Interview notes

As well as observing the day-to-day work activity and conversations of the research participants, I also conducted interviews both with the people connected directly with servicing the Client Account, as well as other members of the organization who had some interest in the Account but were less involved on a day-to-day basis, such as senior managers and board members. The interviews were carried out in ‘sets’ at different times during the data collection period. The timing of the interviews (one set at the beginning of the research period and the other toward the end) enabled me to

take advantage of my increasing knowledge and understanding of the research setting, my sharpening focus on the topic of identity, and the growing trust the research participants had in me. These developments enabled me to ask more pertinent and probing questions relevant to the study in hand.

The initial set of interviews was carried out in December 2001, and involved gaining background information on the individuals with whom I had had contact to date. This included one Account Director, one Key Account Manager, two Account Managers, and an Account Executive. By February 2002 I had also interviewed two Planners involved on the account, totalling seven interviews in the first 'set'. The interviews were held in private meeting rooms to ensure the interviewees felt able to talk freely. I felt at this stage that many of the research participants were still a little uncertain of the purpose of my presence in the organization, and felt wary of speaking openly to me. For this reason I decided not to tape the interviews as I thought this could add to any uneasiness already present, but took detailed handwritten notes, which I typed up as soon as possible after the interview.

The questions revolved around getting a background understanding of each participant including their experience at the organization, previous experience, their current job role, and how they learned their job. I also asked them about their thoughts on the team, relationships within the team, and relationships with the Client. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, during which time I asked open-ended questions such as 'Can you tell me what your job involves?', 'Can you tell me about the contact you have with Client?' and 'Can you tell me about any issues or problems you face in you work?'

The second set of interviews was conducted toward the end of the research, between February and June 2003, and involved a more detailed line of questioning. As I interviewed employees at several levels of the hierarchy, from Managing Director to relatively junior Account Managers, I tailored each interview and attempted to pick up relevant topics during the course of the interview when it seemed appropriate. Examples of the questions asked are provided in Appendix 1.

This time I decided, with the consent of each interviewee, to tape the interviews. In this case, each interview lasted approximately one hour to one hour and 15 minutes, and when transcribed comprised between 20 and 30 pages of verbatim 'talk' each. In taping and transcribing the interviews I attempted to capture the detail of the interview in depth, and to be consistent with the meaning conveyed by the interviewee. The interviewees who took part in the second set of interviews were five Board Directors (comprising two Managing Directors, a Commercial Director, a Planning Director, and a Creative Director); two Senior Group/Client Account Directors; two Senior Planners; two Account Directors; two Key Account Managers; four Account Managers; and three employees from 'Contact' (a sister Agency) who played significant roles on the Account. This made a total of 20 interviewees for the second set of interviews, of which six had also taken part in the first set.

4.8 Context notes

As well as the central hub of data described above I also made notes wherever possible on factors affecting the team, such as a company re-structure and industry trends, and collected artefacts such as company literature, samples of the end product, and examples of work in progress. I felt it was important to take account of contextual factors affecting the actions and interactions of the team in order to more fully appreciate the wider organizational world in which the research participants carried out their day-to-day work.

SECTION FIVE – THE DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

5.1 A chronological account

During the data collection period, after each visit or contact with the research participants, I typed up my notes and filed them in chronological order. During the 18 months there were three distinct phases of reasonably intense visits, broken up by periods during which I took time to reflect upon my notes, write summaries, revisit the literature, and think about how to proceed.

5.2 Phase One

Phase one began with my first visit to the Regional office of Agency on 16th October 2001 to 18th December 2001. During my first visit one of the senior managers laid down some firm ground rules, such as the team was not to be disturbed from their work, and confidentiality must be strict – “nothing must go to the client”. The methods I used for collecting data on that first day became accepted as the norm. This involved sitting at a vacant desk situated within the area that the team were located and jotted notes of the comings and goings of the team during the day. If members of the team were meeting, either with other members of the team, with employees from other parts of the organization, and the Client, I was invited to join them as an observer.

During phase one my main concern was with attempting to understand what the organization did, and what the ‘knowledge sharing’ issues were for the team and organization as a whole. In order to achieve an understanding of these issues, I attempted to take notes as broadly as possible including where people sat, who spoke to and met with whom, the impact of the Client, when and where knowledge was shared, and the potential barriers to sharing. My shift in focus from ‘knowledge sharing’ to the ‘role of identity’ was a result of reflecting on the data collected in phase one, which strongly suggested that identity was an important part of Agency life. Following this shift in focus I endeavoured to choose questions and frame my conversations with the research participants in ways which I hoped would generate data related to the research participants sense of this is ‘Who I am, and what I do’, or this is ‘Who we are and what we do’. This was in addition to on-going observation of day-to-day work life.

In phase one I made eight field visits and conducted five semi-structured interviews with members of one part of the Account Team. During the reflection period I attempted to organise my data into themes and focused on what to feedback into the organization at what I hoped would be an interim stage, although I still had to gain agreement from the managers and research participants that I could continue with my field visits.

5.3 Phase Two

Phase two began on 1st February 2002 with a relatively detailed review and feedback process involving two of the more senior managers on the account team, an HR Manager, my PhD supervisors, and in a separate meeting, personnel from the Client Services and Planning departments. During these meetings the themes I had identified from the initial data collection period were discussed with the research participants, including the concept of identity. The ideas that were discussed around the concepts of identity and identification resonated with the research participants in a way that made me feel confident in concentrating my attention in this area. The employees and the managers involved agreed that they were happy for the research to continue and the next set of visits was arranged.

At this point, however, I felt there was a lack of detail in my understanding of the tasks undertaken and processes involved in ‘getting a campaign out the door’, a phrase often used by the research participants to describe the process of completing a job for the client. In order to fill this gap I approached two of the research participants and asked if I could shadow each of them for a day. They both agreed. The ‘shadowing’ visits provided me with the opportunity to collect more detailed data on the work undertaken. It also gave me a chance to ask questions as we went along, which was more difficult and sometimes impossible, when I was observing the entire Team. Phase two drew to a close on 29th July 2002, after 10 field visits, and two semi-structured interviews with the Planners.

5.4 Phase Three

Phase three began on 27th August 2002 and involved me approaching the two Account Planners with a request to shadow one or both of them. I had found this method of collecting data particularly useful when I had shadowed two members of Client Services as it gave me a more focused lens through which to look. This method strengthened the possibility of taking a multi-perspective view of the Team’s world. I had spent time focusing on ‘the Team’, but I had also interviewed each member which gave me more ‘individual perspectives’. But I had not stopped there. The shadowing days with two Account Managers had provided the opportunity to observe some of the interactions and relationships that had been talked about during the interviews. By

shadowing one of the Planners I was hoping to gain yet another perspective on what was going on.

A more informal start to phase three suggested a level of comfortableness had been reached by the research participants, and myself, about my presence in the organization. The fact that I was now contacting the research participants directly, as opposed to through JW (the initial gatekeeper and senior manager on the Team), indicated a growing level of trust leading to an extension of access. Another example which demonstrates that a high level of trust and comfortableness with my presence had been established was when I arrived at the office one morning and one of the Account Directors and one of the Account Managers were engaged in a very heated debate about a piece of work. When I sat down at the desk I normally sat at, which happened to be adjacent to the ensuing conversation, they barely stopped to acknowledge my arrival, and continued as if I was not there. I took this almost obliviousness to mean that the research participants had largely come to accept my being there as part of a normal working day, and certainly not a reason to change their own behaviour.

After completing eight field visits, including a trip to the Birmingham Motorshow, the end of phase three was marked with a relatively informal review between myself and JW in which she summarised the developments in the Team from her point of view, and outlined the changes in the organization more generally, whilst I relayed to her where I thought I was in the research process and together we agreed on the next steps to be taken. I have described these next steps as the 'extended visits', which are described next.

By the end of the third phase I had undertaken a total of 26 field visits, seven formal interviews, shadowed three individuals, and gathered extensive notes, e-mails, and various organizational artefacts.

5.5 The extended visits

Based on the usefulness of the individual shadowing days I had undertaken during phases two and three, and in order to capitalise on the multi-perspective angle taking

shape in my research, I wanted to gain an understanding from a group level perspective at the ‘departmental’, ‘functional’, and ‘professional’ level. In other words, I wanted to shadow different parts of the Team in their collective capacity, not just as individuals. In order to do this I arranged an ‘extended visit’ to three departments involved in servicing the account, spending a week each with Creatives and Planners and two weeks with Client Services – a week in each of the functions, Brochures and Campaigns/DM. By this point in the research project I had spent some time with each of these parts of the organization and saw these extended visits as an opportunity to view their world from the various perspectives of the different departments. As with the individual-shadowing exercise, shadowing the different departments provided chances to probe a little deeper into their world by asking them questions about why they were doing what they were doing, what their interpretation of different situations was, and what they thought of their intra and inter-organizational relationships.

By way of clarification, departmental level relates to the departments into which Agency personnel define themselves according to their job descriptions, team memberships, and the actions expected to be taken by people fulfilling these roles. Within the context of this research I was interested in the client-facing departments known as ‘Creative Department/Creatives’, ‘Client Services/Account Handling’ and ‘Planning Department/Planners’. The functional level refers to the different functions, which are often fulfilled by several individuals, within each department. In this case these are ‘Art Direction’, ‘Copywriting’, and ‘Studio’ within the Creative Department; ‘Brochures’, and ‘Campaigns/Direct Marketing (DM)’ within Client Services; and ‘Planning’ within the Planning department. Professional level means the profession (job-role) to which they belong i.e. ‘Art Director’, ‘Copywriter’, ‘Account Director’, ‘Account Manager’ and so on. These are summarised below, depicting the main levels of analysis and the multi-perspective nature of the research.

Figure 1: Levels of analysis – multiple levels of identity – multiple perspectives

<i>Organizational identity</i>	<i>Agency or ‘ABCDee’ (anonymous name)</i> <i>Client or ‘Auto’ (anonymous name)</i>
<i>Workplace identity</i>	<i>Agency office in ‘Anonshire’</i> <i>Agency office in London</i>
<i>Group/function identity</i>	<i>Directors</i> <i>The (Auto) Account Team</i> <i>Client Services (divided into Direct</i> <i>Marketing/Campaigns and Fulfilment/Brochures sub-</i> <i>teams)</i> <i>Creative</i> <i>Planning</i>
<i>Individual/professional</i>	<i>Group Account Director</i> <i>Account Director</i> <i>Key Account Manager</i> <i>Account Manager</i> <i>Account Executive</i> <i>Planner</i> <i>Art Director</i> <i>Copywriter</i>

The final stage of the data collection period ended with a set of 20 semi-structured interviews conducted between February and June 2003. Examples of questions used for these interviews are contained in Appendix 1. This chapter, thus far, has described the general approach to the research, how the data was collected, and the types of data collected. The following section describes how the data was analysed.

SECTION SIX – METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

Echoing the phased approach to data collection, analysis of the data was also phased into a series of rounds of analysis, interspersed with visits to the field and searches of the literature to understand how my data, and the ideas and concepts that were being generated related to existing and emerging literature. The consistent method I used to write up the data collected throughout the research generated the base of raw data to be analysed. This method is briefly described next.

6.2 Two-column method

In writing up the field notes and transcribed interview notes I used a two column method (Argyris and Schön, 1974), whereby the left hand column was used to record the observations and/or conversations as they happened within the research setting, and the right hand column was used to record my thoughts about the observations – either while they were happening, or during the course of writing-up the notes, or in later periods of reflection. The notes made in the right hand column can be described as ‘interpretive memos’ used to make sense of ‘complex of emerging practices’ (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1028). I found this to be a useful way to operationalise Eisenhardt’s (1989) recommendation to ‘write down whatever impressions occur, that is, to react rather than sift out what may seem important, because it is often difficult to know what will and will not be useful in the future (Eisenhardt, 1989: 539). This approach was useful as it maintained the contextual, and sometimes narrative quality of the data, whilst also providing me with the opportunity to engage in repeated and recorded interpretation and sensemaking, directly related to the data. Although this method was useful in organising and preparing the data to be analysed, analysing the data itself was interesting, infuriating, often overwhelming, and sometimes messy.

6.3 Cycling between theory, data, and analysis

In order to achieve some semblance of order in the mass of messy process-orientated data generated, I employed a combination of thematic categorising, and thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2004b in Bryman, 2004) to generate inductive and mainly descriptive ways to make sense of the data.

In thematically categorising the data I undertook to code, recode, sort and resort the data into various ‘themes’ which took on different relevance depending on the questions I used to interrogate the data e.g. ‘what’s going on here?’ and ‘what is being described here?’ The emerging themes included ‘intra-organizational relationships’, ‘characteristics of the relationship with the client’, ‘how I describe myself at work’, and ‘what my job is really about’. I found that some of the data lent itself well to this thematic classification whereby sections of field notes and interview transcripts could be coded and sorted into relatively discrete topics and themes. I found that these tended to revolve around *descriptions* of, for example, Agency, the Client, the nature of the work, the relationships between teams and Clients, and relations with the London Agency. I also found, however, that some of the data did not lend itself so well to this type of analysis as the data became fragmented and lost what I considered to be crucial *explanations* of certain phenomena, provided by the research participants in their own terms. These data were often contained within interview transcripts. These answers tended to be long, winding, and often contradictory – with the research participant sometimes noticing the contradictory nature of their answers in real time and trying to further explain or make sense of the contradiction. I found it almost impossible to break into these narratives without losing their richness or explanatory qualities. I therefore treated these in a more holistic fashion and attempted to make sense of these ‘knotted together’ and ‘coherent’ accounts in their entirety (Reissman, 2004b in Bryman, 2004). The thematic and narrative treatment of the data provided effective ways of making sense of the data in terms of producing interesting descriptions. I found, however, that this treatment of the data was not strong enough to provide more analytical or explanatory ‘senses’ from the data.

In order to strengthen the data analysis I used an ‘alternate template strategy’ (Langley, 1999) which enabled me to draw out further insight that I felt to be inherent

in the data as a complete body of material. I attempted to make different senses from the data by holding up the emerging ideas and concepts against the social identity concept and then against the identity work concept to find out which ‘theoretical template contributes to a satisfactory explanation’ (Langley, 1999: 698) that related to the complex role of identity that was evident in the data. I found that each theory on its own was insufficient in providing a comprehensive way to understand identity at work *in the workplace studied*. Each focused on different aspects of identity as a concept, different levels of analysis, and revealed different insights (Langley, 1999). The integrated view of identity, as introduced in the previous chapter and developed throughout this thesis, emerged from the frustration I felt at settling for what was only ‘half the insight’ in terms of understanding the role of identity.

6.4 Making sense of the making sense – finding the inspiration

Retrospectively it is possible to draw a relatively coherent ‘timeline’ of the development of this thesis, identifying the key steps I took to reach the insights provided:

- Step 1 gathered data in a relatively unfocused way, approaching the field armed with not much more than the question ‘what’s going on here?’
- Step 2 retreated from the field, and by probing the data collected through thematic coding constructed some sense of order by introducing the question ‘what is the role of identity in this workplace?’
- Step 3 returned to the field to collect more focused data by arming myself with the question ‘what is the role of identity in this workplace?’
- Step 4 retreated from the field and returned to the literature on organizational identity. Found that the widely used term of ‘social identity’ to be useful in explaining some of the behaviour observed
- Step 5 returned to the field armed with the questions ‘what is the role of identity in this workplace?’ and ‘how are the answers to that question related to existing literature on social identity?’
- Step 6 found some gaps related to the dynamic, processual nature of identity in the workplace that is largely absent from the social identity literature, but present in the research setting

Step 7 returned to the literature to look for clues and discover the literature on ‘identity work’ that seems to fill some of the gaps left by the social identity literature in terms of understanding the role of identity at work

Step 8 identify that the terms social identity and identity work are rarely used together

It is at this point that I do something that Langley (1999) advises against when she discusses how the various strategies used to make sense of process data can contribute to the process of developing theory. I fall for the ‘temptation to integrate divergent perspectives’. There are four reasons, however, why I argue that this is not a mistake in the context of this particular research, which are outlined below:

- 1) The three foundations of this research; (1) Mead’s concept of the I and me which provides theoretical linkages between viewing identity as becoming and identity as being; (2) the common ground between the approaches considered according to Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) methodological framework; and (3) the empirical need (fleshed out in the chapters five and six) provide the underpinning for the two perspectives to be considered side by side, and to a small extent, integrated.
- 2) The complexity and particular characteristics of this type of organization *demand* an understanding of the role of identity in the workplace that is not restricted to an either/or view of identity;
- 3) It is only a mistake to integrate the two perspectives if the combination is not complementary (which they are, as explored in this chapter) and if simplicity is compromised (which I argue and demonstrate in chapters five and six that it is not)
- 4) Integrating these two perspectives is as close to being able to pin-point my moment of inspiration (Langley, 1999) in making the leap from the data to the insights provided.

For these four reasons I argue that the consideration of social identity and identity work side-by-side, in what I have termed an integrated approach in order to shed light on the role of identity at work in these kinds of workplaces is a valuable exercise. In chapters five and six I will use the data from the case to further demonstrate that:

- 1) these approaches can be used together
- 2) these approaches must be used together in exploring the role of identity in these kind of workplaces
- 3) that simplicity has been maintained by introducing the concept of a ‘fluid framework’ of identity to capture the balanced perspective achieved.

Before proceeding to present the insights generated from this exercise, the next chapter introduces and describes the research setting.

Chapter Four: Research setting

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

This research is based on a group of people employed by a regional marketing agency, which will be referred to as ‘Agency’. The group of people work for one client, which will be referred to as ‘Auto’ or ‘the Client’. The group of people will be collectively referred to as the ‘research participants’ or the ‘Auto Account Team’ or ‘the Team’. The Auto Account Team, who they are, what they do, and how they make sense of themselves, individually and collectively, in a work context is crucial to the development of this thesis. This chapter, therefore, is designed to give the reader an insight into the team, their client and their working environment. The mainly descriptive data contained within this chapter is interwoven with comment and interpretation from myself, in order to paint fairly detailed picture of the research setting.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research setting or the inter- and intra-organizational context. The research setting is a crucial part of this research because certain characteristics of this workplace appear to make identity-issues prevalent such as knowledge intensiveness, frequency of change, the complexity of the intra- and inter-organizational relationships and the ambiguity, subjectivity, and public nature of the work itself. These all create challenges that involve engagement with identity processes on the part of the research participants. By the end of the chapter the reader will have gained a picture of the challenges created and faced by the research participants in the context of their day-to-day work.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

The section following this one focuses on the organizational level and describes some of the key features of Agency, including its size, relationship with its London-based head office, its ‘growth agenda’, location, nature of the work, culture and identity. It

also provides a brief outline of the historical context of the organization. The third section focuses on the departmental/functional level and describes the Client Services, Planning and Creative departments, as far as possible using the words of the research participants themselves. Section four focuses on how Agency is divided into Account Teams as well as departments, and pays particular attention to the Auto Account Team in terms of its background, the composition of the team, the work, their office environment, and changes to team members during the research period. Section five describes aspects of the Client and the wider industry context. When interview data is used, the ‘interviewer’ is always myself.

SECTION TWO – THE ORGANIZATION

2.1 Size and status

Agency is a regional office of a large Marketing Agency with offices in London and Leeds. The regional office is based in a quiet market town referred to in this research as ‘Anonshire’. Relationships with the London office are explored due to their influence on the everyday work context of the research participants. The relationship with the Leeds office is not explored, because, according to the research participants I asked, it played no part in their day-to-day work life.

At the time of conducting the fieldwork approximately 70 people worked at Agency. Despite experiencing continuous change during the research period (October, 2001-June 2003), including redundancies and the winning and losing of client accounts, the number of employees remained relatively unchanged. One of the more significant changes during the research period involving a merger with a London-based agency, saw a shift in status of Agency, from head office of a relatively small marketing agency organization, to a regional office of a much larger one. The London-based agency became the head office of the brand new, merged organization, with the former Managing Director of Agency relocating to the London office. The merged organization employed over 300 people. Where necessary I will refer to the merged organization, as ‘ABCDee’ and the previous incarnation of Agency as ‘Dee’. In terms of identity, the change in status, from head office, to regional office, and the change in

name, from 'Dee', to 'ABCDee' caused a good deal of concern and was a trigger for some intensive sensemaking on the part of Agency employees and its managers.

2.2 Growth

At the time of the research, the managers and employees of Agency felt under pressure to grow the organization. This growth agenda formed an important part of the way people talked about the organization, as exemplified in the interview extracts below:

Interviewer: "What would you say are the goals or targets that the Agency has for the next one to five years?"

Interviewee: "Right, the primary one is a financial growth target... we've set ourselves a goal and a target...there's a short term, a medium term, and a long term... first and foremost we need to hit our budget for this year...it's a tough, tough climate out there at the moment and that will be hard, we need to get through that one, and then we've set ourselves a target within the next three years and we need to be able to grow...and that's the key thing" (Agency Board Member, April 2003).

"I think that the strategic agenda for this business is a growth agenda and that the top line commitment that I have made is to try and double size of the business in the next few years which is a challenge" (Agency Board Member, April 2003).

Interviewer: "By what criteria is the success of the Agency evaluated?"

Interviewee: "...growth is the word, there are two aspects to that, top line growth and margin growth... generally you would expect margin growth to fall out of top line growth so its 'go get more business but don't let anything fall out of the bucket at the same time', ...at a world wide level there is a margin level that we are expected to deliver to ... and let's take this year as an example, it's going to be a challenging market out there, even if we don't hit the top line growth challenge then the no-fail is to deliver a 15% margin to the business...that's really challenging because the margin piece is monitored incredibly closely at a world-wide level and the challenge for me is that it leaves very little slack or room for

manoeuvre in terms of investing for growth...” (Managing Director, Agency April 2003)

Growth for an agency can be achieved by winning new work from existing clients, or from winning new clients. Winning new work from existing clients tends to be the responsibility of the senior members of existing account teams who are expected to ‘grow existing clients’ by ‘influencing the clients’ decision making’, ‘cross selling company products’, ‘understanding and influencing profitability’, and ‘actively seek[ing] realistic additional marketing services opportunities and know[ing] how to activate this’ (From Job Description of Account Director). Winning new business by securing new clients is achieved by winning ‘pitches’. This is when agencies compete with one another on various criteria stipulated by potential new clients and will often involve a presentation of Agency’s previous creative work, past achievements, and ideas for the potential client. This way of doing business gives rise to intense competition between agencies, and conflicting pressures on Agency employees in terms of working in partnership with the client, yet trying to win more business from them, and sometimes having to work very closely with other agencies on some accounts, yet also competing with them on others.

2.3 Location

Agency is based on the edge of a small rural town in England. Although location can be seen as a simple statement of where the office is based in the world – a straightforward question of geography, in the context of the marketing industry, and this research, geography is not a straightforward question. The implications of being a regionally-based as opposed to a London-based agency is an important distinction for Agency employees in terms of what it says about them and their organization, in other words, it is a question of identity. Being situated in a relatively sleepy historic market town is a part of how Agency employees and managers define themselves. This is apparent in the following interview extract in which a Board member of Agency talks about the relationship between Agency and its London-based head office:

“we were functioning and still to a large extent do, as separate business units ...we are trying to align ourselves...joining up a bit more...in doing this we need to be recognising that we are different businesses. We have different cultures...and by their very nature of being one in the centre of London and one in the countryside, the cultures that have evolved are very different, so trying to impose exactly the same way of doing things and way of thinking...would be a foolish thing to do...there are things that are unique to us because it’s appropriate they should be. And that’s kind of around this point about how we present ourselves to the world, you know, what is our skill? A lot of that is to do with what people think and what their aspirations are, and they are really really different.” (Board Member, April 2003)

Turning to a contemporary sector-relevant source places these points in a wider industry context. It was suggested that ‘A stigma has been attached to regionally based agencies for years, with a clutch of clients retaining the attitude and snobbery that “only a London agency will do”’ (Rosser, 2003: 12). This assumption is now being questioned by some marketing professionals, with reasons such as technology overcoming communication barriers, the ‘client jolly’ coming to an end, and a more fluid job market being given for why an agency’s location is becoming irrelevant. There are also arguments such as lower overheads outside of London, and a difficult economic climate being cited in favour of being regionally-based (Rosser, 2003). Some still believe, however, that not being based in London creates a certain type of agency that clients do not want. This is due to the belief that new ideas are really only generated in London where you find ‘young and energetic talent’, whereas ‘Regional agencies are populated by older staff and the pace is slower. So rather than go to an agency where people have been sitting on the same accounts for years, clients can find a more diverse, creative product in London’ (Caitlin Ryan, quoted in Rosser, 2003: 12). These are important considerations for the employees of Agency who identify with their employing organization and care about the image of their organization and what it says about them as individuals to the outside world. The ambivalent views about ‘being regional’ were a recurrent theme in the interviews and more informal conversations with the research participants. A summary of these views can be found in Appendix 2.

For the research participants, making sense of and managing their work based identities, in part, meant making sense of what it meant to them to be part of a regional agency. On the one hand they would often express feelings of pride, loyalty, being able to deliver benefits to their clients, and achieving a good work-life balance. On the other hand, they were aware of the stigma in the industry often attached to working for an agency outside London. It is suggested here that meaning attributed to office location is an important symbolic building block for identity processes. It is suggested that it features prominently in the research participants' interactions and narratives about themselves and their organization because it offers symbolic ambiguity. There are convincing and compelling arguments that working for a regional agency is a positive reflection on one's sense of self. If, however, one was in a position whereby working for a London-based agency had to be defended, such as if one was to move to a London office as a result of a promotion, it is possible to make the move without losing 'face' (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, binding oneself to being proud to work for a regional agency, and defining it as part of one's work identity, does not prevent an apparent change of direction in the future. The ambiguity offers a flexibility of identity, which, when faced with a significant change such as moving office, does not necessarily mean contradicting a previously constructed identity.

2.4 Physical environment

Agency is based in a two-storey office building situated on the site of the still fully operational printing press that was the original parent company of Agency. Each floor of the building is a mixture of open plan space, private offices for Board members, and meeting rooms. Agency employees sat in teams, often surrounded by artefacts that represented the client they were working on. The office had a vibrant, contemporary feel created by the placement of breakout areas, sofas, and funky décor.

Agency employees seemed to be relatively free from company directives, rules, or regulations regarding what to wear to work. An initial impression based on a one-off visit to Agency, for example, might suggest that the acceptable attire for Agency employees was 'smart casual', or 'casual business wear'. Looking at each department in turn, and observing Agency activity over an extended period of time reveals a more

complex picture. I observed differences regarding clothing between different departments such as the Planners, the Creatives, and Client Services.

Individuals within Client Services tended to wear clothes that made them look smart, but also fashionable. It seemed important to those working in the Client Services department to give the impression they were stylish, and in touch with the latest trends. Planners tended to wear more classic business attire. Fashion and style seemed to come second to wishing to convey an image of a serious, astute, business-orientated person. Creative personnel, on the other hand, were rarely out of jeans. How the research participants made sense of their dress created interesting ways to explore identity related issues. This is illuminated in chapter five (section 2.4) and proposed as a potential opportunity for further research in chapter eight.

2.5 The Work

Agency is primarily a direct marketing agency, carrying out a variety of direct marketing work including strategic planning, campaign planning and management, creative and copy design, production, printing, and managing the entire process, as captured in the interview below:

“The Agency carries out direct marketing and advertising. We style ourselves as direct marketing on behalf of our clients ... we will develop and manage the execution of a fairly wide variety of direct marketing ... creative and intelligent product are the key things we do ... we tag it as ‘Intelligent Direct Marketing’ ... in terms of what actually pops out the other end ... strengths/background is direct mail ... we’re gaining competencies in the digital area ... I think it’s fair to say that most of what we do ends up as print on paper in one form or another”
(Commercial Director, April, 2003)

This work was done for various clients across several industries including automotive, finance, and the charity sector and was often referred to as ‘below the line’ which comprises direct mail, inserts in magazines, and generic mail or ‘door drops’.

The type of work carried out by Agency employees is important both in shaping the context of the work life for Agency employees, and in conceiving why identity is such an integral part of their organizational world. The work is defined as knowledge intensive, often subjective, and usually carried out to tight deadlines. Agency employees are often involved in making compromises, negotiating with, and trying to placate clients, colleagues, and suppliers because, as one Account Manager told me:

“A Client call can change the nature of your whole day”

This is because one small change of preference or opinion about a piece of artwork, or copy, colour scheme, or date of release of a particular product by the Client can cause a great deal of disruption for many people within Agency. When people are working to tight deadlines and having to deal with competing demands on their time, and committing their very best efforts to the work they produce for the clients, the slightest changes can lead to enormous frustration, knocks to self-esteem, and the agency personnel can quickly become demoralised, especially as they often feel a part of themselves has been invested in the work.

The purpose of the work carried out by Agency means that the final product will be in the public eye, indeed, very often the point is to catch the public's eye. The implications of this, relevant to the current research, are two-fold. Firstly, as the work is out in the public arena, and is in some ways judged according to whether it is noticed by the target audience (assessed as to whether it has achieved “cut-through”), those creating the work, at an individual, team, and organizational level, are putting a part of themselves in a public arena to be judged. Secondly, as the industry is tight-knit, competitors will know which Agencies are working with which Clients. It is therefore possible to see and judge what Agency's competitors work is like, and competitors can see what Agency's work is like. Not only is Agency's work being judged on its merit in terms of achieving the objectives set within the Client-Agency relationship it is constantly being evaluated throughout the industry. In the main, the research participants described their work is stressful, but often enjoyable and highly rewarding.

As with the growth agenda and the geographical location discussed so far, the nature of work is an important feature related to the identities and identity processes of the research participants. Once again, it offers them an ambivalent symbolic building block from which to build, maintain, and change their work-based identities. They can positively evaluate their own work in relation to that of their competitors because their competitors work is in the public domain and easily identifiable and because there is a great deal of subjectivity and ambiguity involved in evaluating this type of work. This does mean that Agency's work is also subject to the same evaluation and subjectivity, which leads to a great deal of justification and defending of one's work and one's own credibility, and identity as a professional marketer.

2.6 Knowledge intensiveness

Knowledge intensive firms are organizations 'where most work is said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-educated, qualified employees form the major part of the work force' (Alvesson, 2001: 863). Evidence from this study suggests that Agency employees see themselves as engaged in knowledge work:

"I would describe probably 90% of what I do as knowledge sharing, where knowledge sharing is defined as 'collecting up facts and information that you think will add value to the task that somebody else is doing'" (Planner, Feb 2003)

"...probably 70% of earnings come from fee, and in order to be able to do that you need to offer people the power of people's brains. What you're selling is intellectual power, their ability to take a problem and solve it through their own abilities and that's really what we're selling to our clients" (Commercial Director, April 2003)

Many Agency employees are educated to degree level, and define themselves as 'professional communicators' or 'professional marketers'. It has been argued that the term knowledge intensive is a vague but useful category where 'Perhaps *the claim to knowledge intensiveness* is one of the most distinguishing features' (Alvesson, 2001: 864). For the research participants, striving to become, and claiming to be knowledge

intensive, or to be doing knowledge work, is part of building an identity for themselves as individuals and for their organization as a whole. It may be considered a benefit in the ever increasingly competitive marketing world to be able to offer your clients ‘intelligent direct marketing’ ‘problem solving capabilities’ and ‘the power of people’s brains’.

2.7 Culture

As mentioned above, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the organizational setting in which this research takes place. It is for this reason I am including here a section on the culture of Agency. Organizational culture, however, is a vast and complex field of organizational research itself, and referring to Agency’s culture within this study can do no more than try and convey a sense of what the research setting is like to be in. A consideration of the culture reveals a crucial point about this particular knowledge intensive setting – its paradoxical nature of being both chaotic / fluid and ordered / structured. For example, one research participant described Agency to me as “quite hierarchical”, whereas another viewed it as “flexible and fluid”.

Agency might be perceived as hierarchical because there are well defined lines of command between different levels of the hierarchy whereby information is expected to travel up the chain of command, and ‘orders’ come down from the top. Those who see Agency as quite hierarchical point out the frustrations and dangers of senior managers not passing information on to the rest of the team from Client meetings for example, or failing to set proper objectives/appraisals for junior members. The ‘fluid and flexible’ element of Agency’s culture was highlighted during a conversation between an Account Manager and myself. I was told that:

‘JS (Client) spent a week in the Agency. He could not cope with how flexible meetings are around here. He didn’t understand how meetings can get moved around. Doesn’t understand when things don’t fit around his day’ (from field notes, 03.03.03).

As well as being described as flexible and fluid, and quite hierarchical, the following metaphor was used to describe Agency culture by one of the copywriters:

“Agency has ME” “Don’t win pitches” (Copywriter, March 2003)

This view seems to present a conflicting view of the organization when compared with the previous two characteristics highlighted. In the first, describing Agency as ‘hierarchical’ conveys a sense of getting stuff done, a sense of organization and order. In the second, describing Agency as ‘fluid and flexible’ – conveys a sense of agility and responsiveness. The third – ‘has ME’ – conveys a sense of tiredness, and being unable to get things done.

Agency was also described to me as ‘entrepreneurial’:

“our culture as a joined up company is only 18 months old so... what I would say is that it is more entrepreneurial because it has to be... my department is now based upon performance so if you perform you get rewarded. If you don’t perform you don’t get rewarded.” (Creative Director, April 2003)

Other, less contradictory features of Agency’s culture that were highlighted to me by the research participants included creativity, centrality of knowledge and experience, a sense of family, parochialism, and being unsung heroes:

“Our key strengths, creativity, I think we’ve got excellent quality of creative. I think we have really good quality thinking and those two, when you combine those two, the results that come out for our clients, like our campaigns, is really powerful.” (Creative Director April, 2003)

“Knowledge equals power culture” – JW tells me that in general people are rewarded for hoarding knowledge and that there is little cross team activity (From field notes, 12.02.02).

“I think that we are sort of unsung heroes, which is a good thing in some ways ... there are some very talented people here ... we’re not always good at selling

that to our clients or internally so we don't always quite understand what our own worth is. I think we are quite parochial in many ways. This business sometimes suffers for being tucked away in a market town in Anonshire and there are people here who are sort of part of that culture ... Agency operates a bit like a family so everyone gets on well, looks after each other's interests ... some clients like us because people like working here... (Commercial Director, April 2003).

Based on these descriptions Agency is understood to be a complex, diverse, ambiguous, rapidly changing, knowledge intensive organization. What is more, Agency employees have to be able to find ways to make sense of and deal with the contradictions and paradoxes they face on a daily basis in order to act in this organizational setting.

In summary, Agency is chaotic, but it is organized. It is hierarchical, but it is also flexible and fluid. There is a general sense of pride in the work carried out and the quality of the people working in Agency, but there are mixed responses to this pride, talking about it in terms of 'unsung heroes' and 'powerful campaigns'. Finally, Agency has been described as a family, but it has also been described as somewhere where people hoard knowledge to protect their own value and worth. As with the previous features highlighted, the culture of Agency appears to provide plenty of scope to be both created and used flexibly by the Agency employees as part of their identity processes. One element that appears to be consistent in descriptions of Agency is that most things are described in terms of meeting client needs, or what the benefit is to the client of the Agency being the way it is. In section five of this chapter, and chapter six as a whole, the importance of the client is explored further through the discussion of the inter-organizational relationship between the research participants and their main client, Auto.

2.8 Identity

During the period that this research was carried out, Agency employees had to make sense of a degree of uncertainty with respect to the Agency's identity, which, it is suggested had implications for their own work-related social identities. The following extract expresses this uncertainty:

“I think we have a confusion of identity between what we are here and what we are as ABCDee as a group. I think London has an identity. We have to decide if we want to be part of that identity or if we want to be something separate. At the moment we are neither. And I think we should be something separate. I think we’ve got enough different things here that we could actually be something separate, something different. We need to get on, find out what those things are and brand ourselves as such otherwise we will just simply be a relatively small, regional agency, and I think we are better than that” (Commercial Director, April, 2003)

The extract above illustrates that there is uncertainty in terms of how to define Agency in relation to their office in London, and its wider network. This extract suggests that this individual felt it was important that the Agency’s identity was based on some substance with respect to the organization itself “we’ve got enough different things here”, but that what those ‘things’ were was subject to some kind of sensemaking “we need to get on, find out what those things are”. What is also detectable from this interview extract is the perception that being “a relatively small, regional agency” is perceived as somewhat demeaning – “I think we are better than that.”

According to this research participant, there are two possible ways the identity of the organization can be achieved:

“Either you can stamp an identity on an organization and say ‘this is what we’re going to be, this is what we’re going to be like, this is what our face will be to the outside world, and therefore we will change ourselves in order to be like that.’ Or we can say ‘this is what we are, this is how we are, and therefore we brand ourselves how we are,’ and in order to do that you have to be very honest with yourself... you have to recognise those things that are quite uncomfortable... so I think we are still at that crossroads and we recognise as a Board what the issues are, but we haven’t chosen what we want to do about it yet” (Commercial Director, April, 2003).

This interviewee expresses the questions and possible processes over how to achieve an identity for the organization. Whichever route is taken, the evidence suggests that during the research period there was uncertainty regarding the identity of Agency as an organization. As touched upon above, Agency merged with a London-based agency, the date of which happened to coincide with the start of this study. The fact that 18 months after the merger the Agency Board still felt at a crossroads in terms of the organization's identity suggests that the merger was significant in terms of its organizational identity. Despite this, many Agency employees expressed a great sense of their employing organization's history. In some respects this seemed to provide a sense of continuity in the face of change and potential turmoil. The history of Agency is given some consideration next.

2.9 Historical context

Founded in 1965, Agency is well established within Anonshire. It began as a printing outfit capable of delivering the mail shots that it published. During the 1980s and 1990s the company was subject to management buy-outs and takeovers, became publicly traded on the New York stock exchange, and ultimately became one of several agencies owned by a French multi-national (ParentCo). In Autumn 2001 ParentCo merged several of its agencies, including Agency, which, prior to the merger had been known as 'Dee'. The extract below comes from an interview with the Creative Director of Agency and highlights that the merger spelled significant changes for Agency:

“...we'd had a company that had started 25 years ago...full of staff who during various management sort of theories, or regimes believed that 'Dee' would give them a job for life, and that was how they were recruited. If you've got a job at 'Dee', you've got a job for life...you could set fire to the print shop and you might get a slapped wrist, but you'll never lose your job...it kind of bumbled along ...if the Agency didn't make money the print shop did, then they'd take money out of the print shop you know, take from Peter to pay Paul, it was like ... a nationalised industry, it was kind of laughable when you look back...it's very difficult for them now to come out of that culture and to accept that what we've done, we've come out of mother 'Dee', who provides all, into an open market

place by joining with ABC who are entrepreneurial and if you don't perform, and if it doesn't work, we're going to have to get rid of people. That is completely and significant turn of culture.” (Creative Director, April 2003).

So far this chapter has attempted to convey a general sense of what Agency is like as a place to work, making efforts to describe the research setting at an organizational-level of analysis. The next part of this chapter moves to a group-level analysis and considers the different collective entities that comprise the research setting. These include the departments, teams and groups of employees into which the research participants describe, categorise, and construct themselves.

SECTION THREE – THE DEPARTMENTS

3.1 Introduction

The members of Agency define it as being organized into departments and teams. Each department comprises people who share a similar functional expertise, and each client-team is made up of individuals from different departments. This way of organizing means that Agency employees are likely to have to report to two managers, a departmental Director, and a client-account team Director. The departments central to this research are Planning, Creative, and Client Services (also known as Account Handlers/Account Managers).

3.2 Client Services department

Employees in the Client Services department are the main interface with the client on a day-to-day basis, they see themselves as ‘own[ing] the client relationship’ and as central to the Agency.

Their tasks and responsibilities span the organizational boundaries because they manage the work-in-progress, which moves between the Client and various departments within Agency, as it develops into a finished piece of work or ‘campaign’. Their work comprises taking briefs from the Client and ‘translating’ them into creative briefs. This translation process requires the Client Services

personnel to be fluent in two different languages ‘Client-speak’ and ‘Creative-speak’, and be able to communicate to both groups the meaning intended by the other, in their own language. Being able to ‘think from’ and ‘act from’ different perspectives is vital to Client Services work and is discussed further in chapter seven. When a brief is communicated successfully, the Creative personnel will work with it to develop and present concepts that they believe will be acceptable to the Client. Client Services personnel are responsible for presenting the ideas back to the Client, gaining approval from the Client to transform a concept into a job, piece of work, or campaign, and making sure that jobs are completed ‘on time’ and ‘on budget’.

Various members of Client Services have described themselves to me as:

“Communicators”

“Client’s representative in Agency and Agency’s representative in Client”

“As Account Handlers we need to understand strategy, but we are facilitators”

“All we are is Waiters. Chefs are Creatives, cooks are Artworkers, Planners are head chefs as they come up with the menu.” (From field notes, 03.03.03)

“The rope in a tug-o-war”

As well as managing people and relationships, another important function of the Client Services department is to manage knowledge and information. In explaining what his job entails, one Account Manager outlines the following:

“Just making sure that everybody who has responsibility and has different skill sets knows what their requirements are on each campaign or project, just to make sure that everything runs smoothly and on time and letting people know the relevant information. So in our heads as Client Services people we need to know what will happen when and make sure people only get told the information they need to know in order to do their job effectively, ... So, as I say, we keep all that information and we feed it to people as and when they need to know” (Account Manager, March 2003).

Client Services employees are expected to understand the entire process of developing and producing a campaign, how all the different departments feed in to that work

process, and what they will need to know in order to do their job, without overloading them with unnecessary information. They must be aware of what the other roles within Agency entail in order to think what the other personnel working on the Account might need to know, and not know. In terms of relating this process to identity in the workplace, it is suggested that the Client Services personnel in particular have to be able to step into the ‘work-shoes’ of their colleagues. They have to imagine themselves playing the role of Creative, or Project Manager and therefore enable themselves to imagine what those organizational members will want or need, in terms of information, in order to do their job.

Within the Auto Team, those who are part of the Client Services department are divided into two sub-groups related to the type of work they carry out for the Client. These two groups are known as the ‘Brochures or Fulfilment Team’ and the ‘Prospecting, Campaigns, or Direct Marketing (DM) Team’. The division between the two teams is conveyed well by the extracts below, taken from informal discussions with two Account Managers from the Brochures Team:

“there is little interface with Brochures and the Campaign team... as we have little effect on each other...not sure of developments on the DM team as we don’t work that closely together.” (Account Manager, Brochures, July 2002)

“I suppose I see an overlap between the Brochures and the DM Team, but essentially I think we are two separate teams.” (Account Manager, February 2003)

Each sub-team deals with a different group of people within the Client organization, and each sub-team sits separately from one another in Agency’s offices. Their lack of interaction with one another, focus on different parts of the client, and the physical distance between them help to construct and reinforce the separation between the two parts of the team.

In summary, Client Services personnel are involved in complex, relationship, information, and knowledge intensive work. They are expected to work effectively within and between the boundaries of their own organization and that of their clients and suppliers. They are expected to achieve this through not only effective

communication, but also through finding ways to make sense of their world from other's perspectives. This is achieved in part through skilfully manipulating their own sense of professional self and engaging in identity work practices as part of their day-to-day work, whilst maintaining a strong sense of their Client Services identity. The development of this argument, that Client Services personnel manipulate their own sense of professional self and engage in identity work practices as part of their day to day work is explored further throughout chapters five and six and discussed further in chapter seven.

3.3 Planning department

The Planning department is responsible for planning the Client's marketing campaigns. Planners are often tasked with 'bringing the end customer to life' using various techniques such as brainstorming, storytelling, and collage. Planners will attempt to create a picture of the end customer for the various products they are involved in marketing, in the minds of other Agency employees. This means that when an Art Director, for example, is thinking about how to develop a brochure that will appeal to an 'Auto customer' he has in mind a person - with an identity, a personality, a life - as opposed to an abstract concept of 'customer'. Agency employees work with the assumption that if you 'understand' the end customer for the product you are marketing you can communicate better with them. Many of the research participants told me their work is 'all about communication'.

Planners are responsible for getting the targeting of campaigns correct, and spend a lot of their time talking about data, and seeking 'quality data'. If Client Services are responsible for the here-and-now of Agency work, Planning are responsible for looking into the future and making sure there will be a here-and-now in one or two years time. As one Planner explained:

“The luxury you have as a Planner is the time to do the thinking and to do that research. It's actually part of my job to have that” (Planner, Feb 2003)

The two Planners who work on the Auto account are seen as part of the Team, according to the Group Account Director, overcoming several factors that can make

them feel isolated from the rest of the team, such as sitting separately from them, and spending more of their time with Client personnel than with other Agency personnel. Furthermore, their work tends to be ‘heads down’ meaning it involves individual, quiet time. The Planners who work on the Auto account have described themselves and their work to me in the following ways:

“Planners are thinkers”

“Able to take job roles in the way we see fit. KT looks after creative execution and understanding the customer base. I look after communications structure and strategy” (DW, 15.02.02)

“often it’s selling ideas into Clients that you’ve developed... It may be being the client’s proxy at a meeting so you go up and where [Client named individual] may not attend a meeting but she knows that you would reflect the sorts of things that you are after because you have already discussed it. So you may go in her place instead in meetings....And often what the Creatives turn to the Planners for us to actually bring the customer to life for them a little bit. We would be doing things like finding any customer research we have which says this type of customer is interested in these things in their lives” (Planner, February 2003).

Similar to the Client Services personnel, Planners are expected to be able to work effectively across the boundaries of their own and their Client’s organization. One aspect of their work that differs greatly from the Client Services is that they are expected to generate ideas that guide the Client’s marketing plans, as opposed to carrying out the demands of the Client. They create and shape many aspects of their Client’s marketing endeavours. In the case of Auto, Planners are deeply involved in the Client’s marketing strategy as well as the individual campaigns. They are expected to develop a timetable of communication, identify correct target markets, and identify the correct channels to reach them. Whereas the Client Services personnel attempt to identify strongly with the Client in order to understand and communicate effectively with them, it is the job of the Planners to create and communicate identities of end customers so that others within Agency can understand

and communicate effectively with these target markets. Once again, we can see how identity plays a key part in the day-to-day work of the research participants.

Between them, the Planners and the Client Services personnel plan and execute the marketing campaigns for Auto. What is actually produced in terms of art-work, copy, design and so on rests is mainly with the Creative department. The Creative department is described next.

3.4 Creative department

The Creative department is responsible for creating images, words and presentation or format to convey messages about brand, promotions, and new products for Agency's clients. This might include how to make a brochure eye-catching, how to design an insert for a magazine, or how to word an e-mail. The Creative department comprises several pairings of an Art Director and a Copywriter. Usually, the Art Director is responsible for the images and the Copywriter, the words, of any particular concept, campaign, or brochure. Each pairing works closely together, often spending days and possibly weeks working on the same project. The relationship they have with their work is suggested in the quotes below:

Interviewer: "Do you get attached to your work?"

Interviewee: "You have to be, but then you have to let it go. But you have to be attached to do a good job" (Art Director, 17.03.03)

Interviewer: "Are you attached to your work?"

Interviewee: "You learn not to be, or else it hurts when someone tells you it's rubbish. You know it's going to get pulled to pieces. Proud of it sometimes."
(Copywriter, 17.03.03)

Each pairing tends to work on one or two clients, however, they may get 'pulled in' to work on other clients when the need arises. This flexible arrangement means that the Creative department can achieve something the Client Services department struggle with – a balance between gaining an in-depth knowledge of one's Client, and developing one's professional skills by working on several clients. Having the

flexibility to work on different clients means that new ideas can be more easily introduced across client teams.

The Creative department does not experience the volume of interruptions and distractions as their colleagues in the Clients Services department. The phone is not constantly ringing, with the noise in the office more likely to be created by CDs being played, or from the Playstation in the corner of the office. As well as a different working environment, they also have a different attitude toward the clients, and a different approach to work, as suggested in the following extracts:

“...shouldn’t let a concept be hampered by political issues”

“got to demonstrate thinking to the Client”

“an Art Director needs time to think, and to form ideas”

“...have to play around with copy and images”

As one of the Account Managers said to me, ‘the Creatives are not commercially minded’. Creativity, as opposed to the Client’s demands, is the priority.

In summary, the Creative department tends to work in pairs, developing the copy and artwork for Clients’ marketing campaigns. They tend to be slightly buffered from the world outside of Agency, rarely having to deal directly with the queries and demands of the clients. They have a slightly rebellious approach to work compared with the Client Services and Planning departments. They do, however, take their work outcome (the copywriting and artwork) seriously.

Each Account Team within Agency comprises individuals from each of the departments as described above. This research focuses specifically on the day-to-day activities of one particular team, ‘Auto’. The next part of this chapter focuses on this Team.

SECTION FOUR – THE AUTO ACCOUNT TEAM

4.1 Introduction

The Auto account is a large and important Account for Agency, with around eight Client Services personnel, two Planners and two to three Creatives working solely for Auto at any one time. During the research period Agency relied on very few clients for the majority of its business. This placed them in a potentially vulnerable position as the loss of just one client could spell disaster for the entire Agency:

“It’s a very big Account, it’s therefore deemed to be quite important to the business, almost critical to the business. If either ‘Auto’ or ‘Financial’ went, the Agency would close. I think it’s as simple as that” (Planner, Feb 2003)

“We’ve got seven clients which is quite high risk as two of our clients are about 80% of our business” (JW, Group Account Director, April 2003)

4.2 Background

The relationship with Auto began in ‘Contact’, a sister company to Agency, in 1995 with inbound call handling (this is an outsourcing relationship whereby ‘Contact’ personnel respond to customer enquiries as if they were ‘Auto’ personnel). This work expanded within ‘Contact’ until, in 2000, the most recent parts of the Account (e.g. Brochures, Direct Mail etc) were won in a pitch by Agency, as opposed to increasing the ‘Contact functions’ of telemarketing, data capture and so on. The research participants highlighted two factors that were thought to be key to Agency winning the account. Firstly, although the Agency pitched at £2million to win the account, the figure agreed upon was £1million, meaning that they had to service the account with a budget much smaller than they had planned for. This put great pressure on the Account Team who constantly had to fight to meet very tight budget constraints. The frustration experienced in the early days of the account is conveyed by an Account Manager:

PB feels they are short staffed. She tells me JW has been off sick due to stress and now MH is away. She feels overworked, “there's not enough time for anything, just reacting to things”. (From field notes, 16.10.01).

A senior managers describes the situation:

JW tells me her biggest problems are they have no control over what work comes from where and when and that her Account Director is off sick. Other problems were listed as: “no time to talk to staff about objectives and developments as many staff missing”, “cannot take on temporary staff in due to budget constraints”, and “there is no-time to share information as it’s heads-down all the time” (From field notes, 16.10.01).

By agreeing to manage the Account at the reduced rate, the Agency had secured what they described as an “important” and “prestigious” Client. At the outset of the Account the Agency employees expressed feelings of being overworked, undervalued, reactive as opposed to pro-active in the face of Client demands, and ultimately frustrated. The manager tells a similar story, with the beginning of the account characterized by a lack of control, neglect over internal procedures, and lack of resource.

The second key factor in the Agency winning the Auto account was that they were part of the same organization as ‘Contact’ who already carried out a lot of direct marketing work for Auto. It is considered normal in the marketing industry for tension to exist between Agency and Contact organizations when they have to work together for a single Client. When Auto selected Agency it was on the understanding that many of the problems often faced in a Contact-Agency relationship would be overcome by virtue of the fact that Agency and Contact were part of the same organization, and thus, as believed by the Client, would be able to resolve these issues in-house, without troubling the Client with them.

4.3 The Team

Perceptions of ‘the Team’ in terms of who was a member and where its boundaries lay changed from person to person, and over time. The various ways the team was described to me are as follows:

“I sort of see it as floating operations, I don’t see it as individuals.” (Account Manager, 21.03.03)

“...Very much long term thinkers and planners ...The best parts of the job are when I get involved in planning, and team atmosphere is fantastic...” (Account Manager, March 2002)

“They [the other client teams in Agency] all see Auto as very ‘heads down’. People might think you’re not interested. We’re always seen as heads down even when we aren’t heads down” (Account Manager, February 2003)

“A lively bunch of people... noisy in the sense of volume and noisy in the sense that everybody wants to heard. Everyone is very much a personality” (Account Manager, February 2003)

The descriptions above suggest that the way the Team think they are seen, as ‘heads down’ and ‘not interested’, is different to the way the members perceive their identity, as a ‘lively bunch of people’, with a ‘fantastic team atmosphere’.

4.4 The aims/purpose of the work undertaken by the Team

When Agency won the Auto account, Auto’s objective was to become one of the top three automotive brands in Europe. It was a shared and explicit belief between Agency and Client that it was Agency’s job to help them achieve this through designing and delivering brochures and direct marketing campaigns. Auto’s objective was a clear, common goal between the two organizations. Agency were expected to work in partnership with Auto, meaning that Agency employees were expected to be involved in developing the Client’s marketing strategy, rather than simply delivering the campaigns as directed by Client. Although highly varied, all work produced had

to be deemed to be within the strict Auto branding guidelines. Branding guidelines, despite being a written set of instructions, are still subject to interpretation and value judgements. The type of work carried out by Agency for Auto, therefore, meant high levels of ambiguity and subjectivity with opinions and preferences of employees and managers from Agency and Client playing a key part in work processes and outcomes. Whether a piece of work is 'good' depends on how well it fits the brief provided by the Client. Level of 'fit' can also be subjective. The relationship of this type of work with work-related identities and the identity processes of the research participants is discussed further in chapters five and six.

4.5 The Team office environment

The Agency décor gives the impression that the Auto Account Team are very proud of the work they do for Auto. Samples of their work, and products are mounted on the walls, displayed in magazine racks, and therefore dominate large parts of the office space of Agency. If you stood for a moment looking just at the Auto Account Team with your back to the rest of the office you would struggle to see any clues indicating that this group of people are not employed directly by Auto. There are Auto employee handbooks on desks, pictures of Autos mounted on the walls above the desks, and samples of Auto branded items. If you look a bit closer, however, you do see Agency mugs and mousemats on desks, and a bag or two with Agency branding. Turn around to the rest of the office which houses the rest of the Client Services department and you see plenty of evidence that this is not Auto's office, there are samples of products and brochures of other clients on the wall.

In many ways, the fact that the Client Teams sit separately, and are surrounded by artefacts of only their own clients accentuates and perpetuates divisions between the Client Teams within Agency. Agency employees have no need, reason, or priority to interact with one another beyond the boundaries of their Client Teams. There are very few symbols within the office itself of a shared identity as they are surrounded with pictures and images of work that represents the corporate image of other companies. The dominance of images of client products, and the symbolic and literal separation

between the client teams, are important features of Agency in terms of the role of identity in the workplace.

4.6 A climate of change

Agency managers claim they have a low turnover compared with other Agencies. Whilst I was conducting my research there were many changes. Within the Auto Account Team alone there was:

- *one redundancy* (a Planner)
- *two transfers out of the team* (an Account Manager and an Account Director),
- *six transfers into the team* (two Account Directors, a Planner, an Account Manager, an Art Director, and a Key Account Manager),
- *three resignations* (a Planner, a Key Account Manager and an Art Director),
- *two new recruits* (an Account Manager and a Key Account Manager),
- *two temporary appointments* (Account Managers) and
- *one transfer within the team* (from Key Account Manager to Planner).

With a total of 17 personnel changes within 20 months there was a sense of continuous change. By the end of the data collection period only five of the original members of the team remained in the same position as when I had begun, although one was in the process of moving to another account, one had been promoted and the most senior member had almost no contact with the team following his move to the London office as part of the merger.

The changes to the personnel, combined with having to deal with constant changes from the Client on work they were undertaking meant that everyday work life on the Auto Account Team often felt as if in a constant state of change. These team-level changes were against the backdrop of significant and continuous change at the organizational level - including the quick succession of three managing directors, the merger with another Agency, and the loss and gain of several accounts. These multi-level changes created turbulent conditions in which identity-related issues frequently came in to play. The climate of change, at all levels of the organization, in terms

identity and identity processes in the workplace is explored further in chapters five and six.

In the final section of this chapter aspects of the Client, and the features of the wider industry that form the work-context for the research participants are outlined. By considering the inter (described next) as well as the intra (described above) organizational context, this research is able to contribute to the literature on identity at work by moving beyond the boundary of the focal organization by considering the inter-organizational context as constructed by the interactions and discursive practices of the research participants. Whilst the boundary of this research is guided by the day-to-day interactions of a fairly small group of people, the interactions observed are complex, inter-organizational, shifting in time and context, and create part of a wider network of inter-organizational interactions.

SECTION FIVE – BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF AGENCY

5.1 The Client

The Client is a large, international Automotive manufacturer, referred to, for the purpose of this research, as the ‘Client’ or ‘Auto’. The Client’s head office is based in Europe, but they are owned by an even larger US Automotive Corporation. The Client Account Team interacted mainly with personnel from the UK office of Auto, with occasional visits to the head office in Europe. Being a marketing agency, Agency mainly dealt with the marketing department of Auto, thus, for the purpose of this research, unless otherwise stated, reference to ‘The Client’ means the Client’s marketing department.

It is not possible to provide a single definition of the Client as different members of Agency viewed the Client in different ways. This multi-faceted perspective of the Client is important in terms of understanding the differentiated relationship with Client between Agency departments. As described by Client Services:

“The client is made up of multiple entities...” (Agency employee, research feedback meeting, February 2002)

“Generally the client is very frustrating as they don’t understand the process...”
(Account Manager, February 2003)

“Client always comes first, unless you make a really big point. I know KW was saying about those catch-up meetings every other Monday ... but if the phone rang ... (Account Manager, February 2003)

As described by Planning:

“They are all quite polite and friendly and professional relationships [within Client], but there’s not a genuinely warm rapport...” (Planner, Agency. February 2003)

“They are the most involving Client I have ever worked with by a long way...”
(Planner, February 2003)

“The most empowering Client to the point where it is often very confusing, I think, for people here where their job ends and where the Client’s job begins...where their responsibilities blur...” (Planner, February 2003)

As described by Creatives:

“Has no taste”

“Has no brains”

“Comes from political objectives”

“Never know what they want”

“Product Managers are aliens”

These descriptions highlight the complexity and diversity of the relationship between Agency and Client, and how the research participants perceived the Client in different ways. During the research period I was able to sit in on several Client meetings; visited the UK head office of Auto; and was taken on a tour of Agency operations with a Client employee. Combined with the comments from the research participants, this has enabled me to build up a picture of the role of the Client in the day-to-day

activities of Agency. This will be discussed mainly in chapter six which explores the relationship between the two organizations in some depth.

5.2 The wider marketing-sector context

The direct marketing sector has, according to one of the most senior managers I spoke with, been through a period of dramatic and lasting change during the last few years:

“Client’s businesses have changed fundamentally. Much more focused on their own margin and their own income. Therefore, the pressure on performance of campaigns is much tighter than it used to be...It’s a lasting change... I can’t believe that margins being generated five to six years ago are about to come back again. Two reasons. This particular business has exploited a growth trend within marketing, which is direct marketing spend. If you go back and track, DM Client side (direct marketing projects commissioned by Clients) was not particularly well resourced, but now, they’re skilled up, now equipped. You can’t get away with ‘I’ve got this great list, let’s give it a go’. Demand is more educated, therefore supply has got to respond to that” (Board Director, April 2003)

When this research began, the state of the marketing industry was very uncertain. The same manager who I have quoted above told me:

‘Recession is half expected. Do not know how this will affect discretionary spend of Clients. Have found that spending on ‘above the line’ advertising is going down, but this is not a ‘Dee’ thing. Businesses are being more cautious’ (From field notes, 16.10.01)

Toward the end of the research period, sector intelligence suggested that “marketers intend to cut spend on traditional advertising and up their investment in direct marketing and interactive services, according to a survey carried out jointly by Paris-headquartered global agency holding company Havas and the London Business School” (World Advertising Research Centre (WARC), 25.06.03). This expectation was expressed by Agency’s Commercial Director:

“I think that the advertising industry per se is changing but I think that’s been going on for quite a long time. I think that we will probably see quite a contraction over the next two to three years of the above the line part of the advertising industry, so the conventional television, press advertising barons will start reducing fairly substantially. Probably once the big recession within this industry starts lifting we’ll see more money going into below the line agencies who are ‘targeting’. But I think even the tradition of the below-the-line agencies is shifting so an Agency like us which has done, the majority of their communications has been direct mail I think that will start changing now. Certainly it will start to accelerate that change as we come out of recession and I think the amount of direct mail we will do will start reducing slowly, then substantially so I think that direct mail is in for a bad time in the long run. I think that other forms of targeted communication will start taking over. Largely it will be digital, largely it will be digital so it will either be on-line communications, it will be interactive TV communications or it will be around sms texting” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

As well as a continuously changing context of the marketing sector, other characteristics of the marketing industry included the recognition that an Agency’s reputation, image and associated publicity is crucial to winning and keeping clients:

“They’re just trade rags, but clients read them so it’s important to get the column inches” (Board Director, April 2003).

“You need to be a financially secure business and one that is doing well in order to attract the big clients” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

Furthermore, the level of competition was extremely high:

“It’s a tough climate out there at the moment ... so new business is very difficult to get, lots of people chasing it ... we’re chasing one very large account at the moment which is up for statutory review and apparently there are 100 agencies after it...” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

“Have to make sure we’re always doing a fantastic job or someone will leap in

and exploit it” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

“The Agency world is highly competitive and secretive and all that stuff and the natural assumption is that Agency A is going to try and stuff Agency B, that’s what they exist to do” (Managing Director, Agency Regional, April, 2003)

In summary, during the research period, the industry context in which Agency operated was characterised by rapid and frequent change, intense competition, developing technology, and more astute Clients. The impact of these characteristics on the identities and identity processes of Agency employees are explored in Chapters five and six using the integrated perspective.

SECTION SIX - CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a picture of the intra and inter-organizational context of this research setting, and to begin to point to how and why identity and identity processes are important in the day-to-day work life of the research participants. By providing descriptions of Agency, its work, context, departments, teams and the main Client in question, and suggesting how and why identity forms an integral part of the day-to-day work of Agency, this purpose has been achieved.

The next chapter aims to provide a more analytical reading of the data and draws from and develops the integrated perspective proposed, to explore the intra-organizational relationships in terms of social identities (as resources), and the identity processes/identity work (as struggle) in the day-to-day context of the research participants.

Chapter Five: The role of identity in an intra-organizational context

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

Chapters two and three of this thesis have set out certain foundations upon which an argument for an integrated approach can be made. It is suggested that an integrated approach can help to broaden and balance researchers' views of the role of identity at work. This in turn can help to develop understanding within this field by providing new insight into certain organizational settings. The complex nature of many contemporary organizational settings, such as the knowledge intensiveness, rapid change, and subjectivity of the work, has implications for identity and identity processes. In particular it is proposed that the complexity of the role of identity arises because not only do individuals throughout the organization draw from strong senses of social identities (i.e. professional, departmental, team, and organizational), which provides a resource for guiding action and enabling them to make sense and deal with the challenges of their day-to-day work, they also, due to the ambiguity and constant change that characterises their work, engage in intensive identity work that shapes, changes, and enables them to shift rapidly between these social identities. It is therefore argued that, rather than focus on the identity work *or* the social identities of the individuals in question, one way to understand more fully the role of identity in this kind of organization is to draw these concepts together within the same study.

The next two chapters concentrate on a further foundation of the argument for an integrated perspective – the empirical imperative of generating complex understandings of identity at work because of the complexities of contemporary workplaces. They do this by putting forward the key insights from within this organizational setting that have been realised by applying the concepts of identity work and social identities within this study.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the need and usefulness of an integrated approach when exploring the intra-organizational relationships within a knowledge intensive organization by using it to explore and offer insight into them. Attention is drawn to identity at work as a dynamic, complex pattern of creation and change, within a symbolically constructed framework of identifications that are used as resources by individuals when dealing with the challenges of day-to-day work. In the context of intra-organizational relationships, this translates into shifting between identities, the co-construction of departmental/professional identities, and a useful tool to employ when dealing with contradiction and ambiguity in the workplace. This chapter also provides insight into the role of identity at work by providing an analysis of the data in a way that addresses a gap left by much of the literature in this field, that identity in organizations is a multi-level issue which crosses organizational boundaries and should be approached in this way.

When carrying out this analysis it was noted that the role of the Client in the day-to-day work activities of the research participants was so pervasive and integral to the challenges they faced, it was almost impossible in any practical sense to consider the role of identity within this workplace without exploring interactions that crossed organizational boundaries. The nature of the relationship with their clients, and in particular 'Auto', is one of the key factors that highlights the importance of understanding identity at work as complex. The chapter that follows this one, therefore, is focused on the role of identity in the inter-organizational relationships between the Agency employees and their Client.

Within this chapter, empirical examples from the case are provided which suggest that identity is usefully viewed as a pattern of 'being' *and* 'becoming', which demands that the importance of both social identities, and identity work, in this kind of organizational setting is appreciated. This chapter pays special attention to the role of identity for individuals when dealing with *day-to-day challenges* in an intra-organizational work context, which is particularly important when Agency employees have to make sense of knowledge intensive and sometimes, ambiguous work tasks and complex relationships. Put another way, this study places identity within its

everyday context of marketing work, day-to-day interactions, and intra-organizational relationships and explores how it is both used and created by organizational members within such a context.

The data comprises my observations of the research participants' everyday work life, and what they told me in interviews and during informal conversations about their work, their clients, teams, job roles and relationships. Making sense of the data using an integrated approach has involved understanding how the various work-related social identities are variously constructed, defined, changed and maintained in interaction by the research participants *and* how they are used to defend, guide and justify behaviour in the complex interactions that characterise their organizational world. It is suggested that relationships between social identities can be perceived, and are created through identity-related narrative, and actions, or identity work. Differentiating between narrative and actions provides an insight into 'claimed identities' situated in the text and talk of the research participants, and 'lived identities' played out and enacted in the concrete actions and relationships between research participants.

It is argued that the insights offered into the role of identity by using an integrated perspective, and demonstrated throughout this chapter and the next, are vital to exploring and understanding more about life in contemporary, knowledge intensive organizations.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

The section following this one deals with what is meant by work-related social identities in the context of this research setting. It is outlined how these frameworks of symbolically and socially constructed and negotiated identities can benefit employees and managers in terms of providing a way to maintain order and make sense in problematic situations. It is also illustrated that these can lead to frustration if expectations are not met. It is argued that these work-related social identities are strongly felt, but lightly held – evidenced by the degree of flexibility of social identities within and between interactively maintained boundaries. Consideration is

also given to how the research participants push the boundaries of social identities, theoretically couched in terms of dramaturgical and interactionist extensions to the concept of social identities, by improvisation, and acting out of character in order to deal with some of the challenges they face within their work.

Furthermore, the empirical imperative for an integrated approach is evidenced in how identity work is engaged in order to achieve permanent transformations and temporary changes to social identities, shifting between social identities and adopting the social identities, or perspectives of others. Next, a multi-level, longitudinal, process orientated example is provided to illuminate further the contention that identity at work should be seen as both a resource and a struggle.

Section three of this chapter asks what can be learned about the role of identity in this workplace by considering an intra-organizational relationship where there is very little interaction? This section considers the Auto Account Team in terms of its relationship with other Account Teams across Agency. This analysis highlights one of the most important insights from the research in that one of the key roles Agency employees play in the Agency-Client relationship is to bring different perspectives to bear during the course of their everyday work. This means creating, maintaining and managing multiple and diverse identities as part of their every day work.

SECTION TWO - WORK-RELATED SOCIAL IDENTITIES

2.1 Separations and interactions

As outlined in some detail in the previous chapter, Agency is organized into sub-teams, and teams, which are built around the needs of their clients. The client-teams comprise individuals with different specialist areas of knowledge, skills and expertise, from different departments, who come together during the course of their working day in order to carry out work that will satisfy the needs of their clients. It is both how these groups and individuals are separated along identity-related divisions, and in their coming together in their intra-organizational context in which this chapter is interested. Before we can consider how the groups and individuals come together in

cross boundary interactions, we must first understand a little more about their separateness or distinctiveness as defined by the members of Agency.

The functional, departmental, and team separations throughout Agency tend to be strong and well maintained by employees and managers, with individuals managing multiple, nested social identities as a result of simultaneously identifying with their sub-team, team, profession/function, department and workplace. Distinctions between different parts of the Agency are clearly, and consistently made by the research participants and were reinforced in periods of reflection, such as during the interviews carried out for this research. The extract below is from a conversation with an Account Manager who is telling me about the relative ‘importance’ of different departments within Agency:

Interviewee: “We’re the centre, not that everything revolves around us because it doesn’t but in a way it does. It’s quite hard to describe that, we’re the facilitators, we’re not the um I don’t want to say we’re the most important part, but ...

Interviewer: What would you say?

Interviewee: “We obviously make things happen. If we didn’t bring briefs into the Agency we wouldn’t generate any money so Project Management or Creative or the Client wouldn’t get anything done, so in that sense we are key” (Account Manager, March 2003)

It is suggested that the research participant is engaged in a struggle in defining his own department, however, the distinction between his own department and others is more easily made. These relatively well-defined divisions between departments underline the strong but multiple social identifications, maintained by frequent and repeated interactions, throughout Agency. Individuals are defined by, and self-categorise according to the teams, departments, and functions that represent what they do, and who they are, in a work context. It is suggested that these strongly felt identifications can be beneficial for organizational members in maintaining a sense of order and organization, by suggesting guides for actions in what can sometimes be a fairly chaotic and ambiguous workplace setting. An example of this is when the Account Managers are mindful of the boundaries between themselves and the ‘Creatives’ (Art Directors and Copywriters in the Creative department) to the extent

that when they have what they call a 'creative' idea, they choose to not share it with their team-mates from the Creative department in order to avoid what can often be a defensive response on the part of the Creatives. It is suggested that the care taken not to act in a way that might be seen as an encroachment on the accepted professional or specialist activities of others ensures a degree of stability in working relations with co-workers. It also demonstrates a degree of collective will and action to maintain professional identity boundaries in a work environment where professional status cannot be taken for granted (Alvesson, 1994) and work itself is ambiguous. These strongly held and well reinforced work-related social identities enable Agency employees to engage in inter-group comparisons which reinforce their own sense of self and self-esteem as a member of a particular group, bringing order and purpose to their working life (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and justifying their worth as individuals, and as members of their team/department/organization and so on. In this sense, identities are seen to play a stabilising role in the workplace and relationships between colleagues.

Strongly felt, salient social identities can, as well as suggesting guides for action and order, also influence expectations. The example provided below highlights how the expectations of behaviour according to social identities can lead to frustration and reinforcement of role within the workplace setting:

Creatives get annoyed with Account Handlers for not managing the Client in the way they think they should (e.g. Account Handlers should 'stick up' for the Agency more). Creatives are prepared to say what they think. They like to be thought of as 'devils advocate' and feel this is their role. (From field notes based on observations during extended visit to Creative department, 18-03-03)

It can be suggested that the Creatives hold a view about how Account Handlers should act in terms of the relationship with the Client. They also hold a certain view regarding their own role *as* Creatives. Discursive readings of such data would point the researchers' inquiring mind into how these identities are linguistically created in the stories, discourse, or conversations between the Creatives and the Account Handlers in the context of the complex Client relationship. A more socio-psychological reading might suggest this is evidence of an in-group/out-group

comparison, or a salient identity-related mindset influencing perception. In this sense, social identities are seen as providing a framework of behaviour that is deemed to be acceptable and appropriate for a member of a particular group, such as 'Auto Team', 'Creative', 'Planner', 'Account Manager' and so forth, by actor and audience. An integrated view suggests that as well as creating a guide for action, the socially ratified identity is also used as a guide against which to evaluate behaviour, with the guide created within and between the actors.

Evidence from this research suggests that Agency employees create and hold a strong sense of 'being' a 'Creative' or an 'Account Handler' or an 'Agency person'. That is not to say that these categories are adopted unquestioningly, wholeheartedly, or even that the social identities themselves are not problematic and complex. What is being said is that the concept of social identity remains relevant and important in studies of identity at work because it is a useful way to see that organizational members use them as guidelines for actions in a complex working environment. They also provide a way to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and act from this sense in ambiguous settings. In this workplace, social identities are understood to be strongly felt, but lightly held due to the flexibilities afforded by and demanded by the nature of the work and the complexity of the relationships that characterise this workplace. This notion is explored further next.

2.2 Social identities: strongly felt but lightly held

The extract from the Planner's interview (below) not only offers an example of how a work-related social identity guides how an individual makes sense of his work, it also evidences the evolving nature of the job role showing that the social identity frameworks created by the team, departmental, and organizational divisions contain a degree of flexibility due to the control some Agency workers have over their work and the way they make sense of this.

Interviewer: Do you have a formal job description?

"Had one. Was employed in 'South West City' Agency. I was the only Planner so job description was written in a very broad sense. [Now] Able to take job roles in the way we see fit. KT looks after creative execution and understanding the

customer base. I look after communications structure and strategy. This has emerged in some ways, evolved through gaps being generated” (Planner, 15-02-02).

This extract demonstrates a degree of flexibility within the Planner’s role, making space for him to engage in identity work that establishes separate areas of responsibility for the two Planners. It is in this sense that identities can be described as strongly felt, suggesting responsibilities and guides for action but lightly held in that changes to these are acceptable and even expected. ‘Strongly felt’ relates to the perception that the group-level collective identities were important to the participants in terms of how they defined themselves. ‘Lightly held’ relates to the perception that despite their relatively stability, individuals move deftly between their multiple work-related social identities and that they changed over time. These examples are further explored by drawing from the dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959) and interactionist perspectives (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

2.3 Saving professional face/improvisation

When one of the Planners is called upon to run a brainstorming session on a new Auto concept for Agency and other agencies working on the Auto brand she is distressed by the request. She feels that she does not understand the concept, and yet is being asked to demonstrate her knowledge to her colleagues and employees from other agencies. As was outlined in the previous chapter, a very important part of the Planner’s job is to bring to life abstract concepts, such as ‘the end customer’, or in this case, ‘the branding’ of a new concept for a car. It is highly irregular for a Planner to not be able to deal with this aspect of the work. At the time, however, the Planner in question was very new to her role.

In order to deal with this particular challenge the Planner enlists the help of an Art Director and a Copywriter and frames her request for help from them as ‘embarrassing’ and ‘letting them in on her personal problems’. In terms of highlighting a relationship between social identities and identity work, the way the Planner frames the problem is important. The Planner is effectively ‘switching’ from her ‘professional/departmental’ social identity into a more personally guided identity.

This enables her to approach the Creatives and ask for help, without losing 'professional face'. Her identity as a Planner remains strong, but temporarily recedes, or becomes less salient as a guiding framework. In order to do this, it is suggested she has engaged in identity work, drawing on a discourse that makes salient, or brings her personal identity to the fore. She has created flexibility within her identity framework through identity work in order to protect her professional identity.

Within this same example, during the meeting in which the Creatives try to help the Planner by bringing the concept to life for her, both the Planner and the Creatives have to improvise their interactions, which fall outside their usual repertoire of interactions, and enact a new dimension to their relationship. The professional/departmental identities of the individuals involved hold in that they continue to define themselves as 'Creatives' and 'Planners', however, the normally adhered to guidelines in terms of behaviour and expectations toward one another are disrupted as the Creatives are being asked to take actions and fulfil a role which falls outside of what is usually expected of them *as* Creatives in relation to the Planner, and the Planner is having to do the same.

The first part of the example above, in which the Planner frames the issue as a personal problem and switches between different identities to do so, can be understood in terms of a relationship between social identities and identity work. The second, in which the Creatives and Planner have to improvise their interactions, demonstrates further the interactively created flexibility of their functional/professional identities, which in this instance is used to help them deal with the everyday challenges of their work. This example highlights how identity processes play a part in constructing and solving a problem. The next example demonstrates how identity, and its important symbolic relationship with clothing (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Humphreys and Brown, 2002a), represents identity as a struggle for the research participants.

2.4 Protecting professional identity/acting out of character

It was explained to me during one of my visits that the wearing of suits by one of the Art Directors had elicited some unfavourable responses from some of the other

Creatives. Choosing to wear a suit to work was perceived by other members of the Creative department as not really being a 'Creative', and the employee in question was gently ridiculed for not conforming to their non-conformist ways. The act of wearing a suit to work by this person at this time was perceived as deviating from being a Creative, as Creatives tend to see themselves as rebellious and somewhat anti-bureaucratic, and one of the ways they achieve this is by wearing jeans to work. This example shows that work-related identities may be protected and maintained, in this case by fairly well humoured peer pressure, by protecting the symbols that represent them, in this case, wearing jeans to work. It might even be argued that in this instance the Art Director had poked a metaphorical hole in the socially constructed boundaries of his social identity as a Creative, and the group that perceived him to be part of them attempted to plug the gap through symbolically interactive means. Furthermore, it was suggested by one of the research participants that the Art Director secretly wanted to be an Account Manager, which was why he dressed in a suit – to be more like them. Once again the concepts of both social identities and identity work can be fruitfully brought to bear in order to understand this particular aspect of identity at work, and how the research participants made sense of it. It is suggested that the social identity framework from which the Creatives acted guided the judgement regarding the Art Director's attire. The relationships between dress and identity in terms of potential for further research are discussed in chapter eight.

The two examples above provide evidence of when the research participants improvised within, and poked a metaphorical hole in, the boundaries of their acceptable and accepted social identities. In both examples there were degrees of discomfort felt by either the actor (the Planner in the first example) or the audience (the other 'Creatives' in the second example) when an accepted and socially negotiated/ratified identity was disrupted. In both examples it is apparent that identity work was employed to both make the changes (switching from a professional to a personal identity), and trying to re-establish identity norms (in the second example).

Using the concept of social identity to explore identity in the research setting provided the scope to undertake an interesting analysis of the role of identity in this workplace setting. Frameworks for guiding and evaluating action are revealed, and, by drawing from the interactionist perspective, a degree of improvised flexibility within these

definitions can be achieved. It is argued however, that this remains only one side of a two-sided coin, in terms of understanding the role of identity in this workplace. By introducing the concept of identity work an integrated approach is created which provides a broader, balanced perspective in which the emphasis is on both the role of identity as a resource and identity as a struggle. By doing this more is revealed about the role of identity in this kind of workplace setting. For example, more can be understood about how identity is a) used in day-to-day work as a guide to action, and b) how social identities can be switched between to construct and solve problems, c) how identities can be symbolically enforced by peers to maintain stability.

An integrated approach, in this particular research setting, also helped to explore how the research participants achieved two types of changes to their social identities. The first of these changes is a permanent transformation, such as moving from being an Account Manager to a Planner. The second of these changes is more temporary, but in many ways more complex, and involves two stages. The first stage is described as shifting between ones' nested social identities. The second part is attempting to understand the social identity of a colleague in order to 'think like them', without losing the perspective as guided by one's own social identities. Recognising the importance of, relationship between, and distinction between social identities and identity work helps to achieve these insights. Examples of the transformation and temporary changes to social identities are provided next to illuminate this point further.

2.5 Transformation: from Account Handler to Planner

An integrated perspective enables us to see how identity work is employed by an Agency employee to effect a permanent change in her social identity – from being an Account Handler to being a Planner. In the extract below a more senior Planner is recounting her experience of her transformation from being an Account Handler to a Planner and relating her experience to that of a current employee attempting to do the same:

Interviewee: "...I know what it is like to try and transfer from having an account handling background and an account handling relationship with client to developing a planning one and needing people internally and externally to perceive you as different when you make that change and at the moment she's having a quite horrible time of trying to get the business to free her up, to properly become a Planner. Because almost if you don't draw a clean line on it, clients and internal people will continue to exploit the fact that you can do both things. *Yep*. And it will be 'Oh, just while you're at it, can you make the client contact on that one.' Maybe you wouldn't if you were a Planner bought in from outside..."

Interviewer: How do you go about drawing those boundaries within a working environment?

"...one of the things that I personally felt was quite important when I first started working as a Planner was actually to sit separately from the Account Team, and I know it is only a superficial thing, but if you are actually sat with a group of people who have specialist skill like planning, you then actually make people change state when they are coming over to talk to you because they know they are coming over to talk to 'The Planners' any of whom might chip in an idea, you know, if they overhear stuff or if they've got some background on things and it just creates a little bit of a physical boundary" (Planner, February 2003)

The Planner quoted can be perceived to be talking about carrying out identity work, or engaging in the narratives and actions, that will (re)enforce a permanent change in her social identity from Account Manager to Planner. It is suggested that the Planner is speaking from her experience, reflecting on the past from the position of her current identity. Specifically, she talks about employing the symbolic resource of a physical boundary, to enable the Account Manager to change her own and others' perceptions of her and her role within the organization. The job title may have changed overnight, but she now has to do the identity work in order to achieve the new social identity. She is describing identity work, but she is making sense of it from a current social identity.

2.6 Creating temporary changes

Data from this research suggests that the research participants not only define themselves and others in terms of social identities, they make use of these when dealing with some of the challenges of their day-to-day work, as evidenced in the examples above. The following examples highlight how the research participants engaged in identity work in order to move between different social identities in order to approach their work from different ‘perspectives’ or guiding frameworks. The next interview extract exemplifies how this research participant shifts between his ‘professional/functional’ perspective *as an Account Manager*, and his ‘team’ perspectives *as a member of the Auto Account Team*, evidenced in his use of the terms ‘them’ and ‘we’:

Interviewer: Why do you see Creatives as the most important?

Interviewee: “Because **they**, in a pack they encompass everything **we** want to do, so **they** do the practical things like **they** have the right call to actions, **they** have the right information included so that Planning’s objectives are achieved, but **they** also do the brand work on Auto to make sure that what **we** communicate about Auto in terms of look, feel, content is all up to speed...I think that Planning is probably equally important because that’s what influences the creative, but Creative had to influence what Creative want. Yeah, so, I mean it’s like 2% difference in how important they are” (Account Manager, March 2003)

It is suggested that this is evidence of switching or shifting between different social identities whereby when a departmental identity is most salient, Creatives are ‘they’, but when a team perspective becomes salient, Creatives and Account Handlers become ‘we’.

Each of the groups with which an individual identifies may have commonly accepted and diverse values, beliefs, and characteristics, which provides the individual with the scope to adopt different perspectives, over time and in different situations. In this particular organizational setting, where the individual is expected to be able to think from different perspectives in the course of her day-to-day work, her ability to switch between different social identities is very important. For example, with reference to the above the example, there are times when the Account Manager must make an

inter-departmental division between himself (Client Services) and Copywriters/Art Directors (Creatives) in order to provide the space for each ‘specialist’ to bring their different skills to bear in servicing the needs of the Client. At other times, however, Client Services and Creatives must see themselves as a unified group with common goals and a shared, team-based perspective in order to present a new idea to the Client with full support from the Team, even though there may have been many disagreements to get to that point.

Agency employees and managers talk of ‘an Agency perspective’, into which all the other work-related social identities are nested. An Agency perspective was evoked by one of the senior managers on the Auto Account Team when a situation arose in which it was felt that if the Agency allowed Auto to use some images within a particular campaign it would put the Agency’s reputation at risk. Guided by an Agency perspective, the Agency employees wanted to distance themselves from that particular piece of work if the Client continued to insist on using the images that Agency felt were inappropriate. This is particularly unusual because it is very rare that Agency will disagree with Client so strongly that some common ground (objective/goal/judgement) between the two organizations cannot be generated within a piece of work. That is to say that in identity terms it is rare that Agency employees or managers will be in a position whereby their Agency/organization identity becomes salient in a way that overrides their strong sense of Client identity or that identity work is not successfully employed to overcome the impasse. In the subjective world of marketing, having a strongly held social identity at an organization level, and being able to draw from it in order to make sense and make decisions in the face of some quite serious challenges was very important to Agency employees. This is discussed further in chapter six.

2.7 Dealing with contradictions

Being able to shift between levels of social identity helps Agency employees deal with the frequently contradictory nature of their work. In the example below, the Group Account Director for the Auto Account Team expresses views guided from two different perspectives, a team perspective, and a personal/career point of view:

“We, on Auto, we have quite an in-depth relationship with the London office. We use them kind of as a supplier to deliver the digital side of our strategy. But we don’t just use them as a supplier...[they are] integrated within our team, day to day conversations etc...Personally, from a career point of view, I have links into MH and I’m building relationships with the CEO so at a group board level I know it is important for me to be recognised so they know who I am and what I’m up to” (Group Account Director, April 2003).

In describing the relationship with the London office, the Group Account Director reveals that she sees the relationship from different perspectives, as guided by two different aspects of her social identity framework. The first is her identification with the Auto Account Team, the second is her personal, or as she calls it ‘career’ point of view. Engaging in identity work in order to create the flexibility to see this relationship in different ways enables the individual to act in a variety of ways that may be contradictory with one another, but consonant with her sense of self as they fit with at least one of her work-related social identities. For example, she may be required to work on a pitch for a new client that would subsequently be managed by a team in London. From the Auto Account Team point of view this would cause dissonance for the individual as it would take her away from spending time on work for Auto. From a career point of view, however, working with managers from the London office and getting herself noticed she perceives beneficial at the individual level. The integrated approach assists in drawing attention to a differentiation between social identities at play as a way of ordering and making sense of her world, and employing identity work to move between them.

2.8 Wearing different hats

As well as shifting between the identities by which they define themselves, the research participants also frequently engaged in a practice of what they describe as thinking from the perspectives of others as defined as those outside of one’s own group. I was able to ask one of the research participants about this during an interview – he described this as ‘wearing different hats’:

Interviewer: When you say you've got somebody's hat on, can you describe, can you explain to me what that means?

“What does that mean? Ok, in my first job as an Account Handler ... my job description was ‘you are the Client’s representative in the Agency and you’re the Agency’s representative with the Client’ so when I am with the client I am thinking ‘how can that be done? ... So that’s with all the different hats, so you need to think, you need to second guess what Creative or Project Management would say so that’s why you need to understand the process and the skills sets. I mean, obviously I’m not a print buyer or what have you, I can’t draw the concepts, but I can understand their thought processes behind, that’s why you need to have a different hat on. If I’m in a meeting with Client and they say ‘creatively we want to do this’, ... and you don’t think this consciously but you teach yourself how to, but you think ‘if I went back to the Creative and said right, the client wants it like this, what would their reaction be?’ And then you have to say, so they would ask you however many questions so they would say ‘why do they want it like that?..... etc’. So you need to go back with that information before they ask it so when they do ask you it you can go back and they go ‘right, I see’. Similarly, when the Creatives present you with something that you have to present to the client you have to then say, ‘how would the client react to this? Why will they buy this creative? All those sorts of things so yeah, all these different hats on means you need to know how all these different people think” (Account Manager, interview, March 2003).

The research participant quoted above conveys how social identities and identity work are both part of his everyday work. Different groups throughout his organizational world are relatively well defined and maintained through relatively consistent, reinforcing symbolic interactions. By working out how these different groups think, the Account Manager is attempting to temporarily adopt their social identity. In this sense, he is trying to assimilate himself into the mind-set of another, based on his understanding of that group’s skills and priorities. In other words, the social identity framework enables the Account Manager to order and make sense whereas identity work is engaged to move between a multitude of identities, some of which he may not claim as his own. These Agency employees, and in particular, the Account Managers, engage in complex processes of manipulating their own identities and finding ways to

engage with the identities of others in order to think from the perspective of different departments/professions. It is therefore argued that, at least in part, their 'professional-identity' is built around being able to be flexible in terms of identity, such as being able to 'think like the end customer', or 'take the Client's perspective'. Identity work in this context is about the practical application of individuals managing their own social identities in order to get work done.

It helps to work with the concepts of both social identities and identity work in order to shed light on the phenomenon outlined above. Social identities provide a way to understand the division between the different groups, as defined by the research participants themselves, and identity work provides a way to understand how these divisions are created, maintained, and navigated. The integrated approach is important as it enables the researcher to bring the concepts of identity work and social identity together without losing the benefits of each of the concepts when considered independently.

2.9 Multi-level, multi-perspective role of identity, over time

Thus far, this chapter has presented extracts and examples from the data exemplifying how identity is seen to play an important part in the daily work-life of the research participants. The next section draws from process data, characterised as multi-level and ambiguous 'sequences of events' (Langley, 1999), to provide further insight into the role of identity at work. Again, in line with the integrated approach, it is crucial to undertake this kind of analysis in addition to the more discrete examples provided so far in order to have a greater opportunity to explore the processual/becoming side of identity at work.

The following example provides further evidence that the research participants created and moved between their various work-related social identities as a way of creating and using multiple perspectives in their work. These multiple perspectives were used by the research participants to define and resolve problems arising in their day-to-day work, in multiple and flexible ways. This is why, in this workplace, it is important to recognise identity as a resource as well as a struggle. The multiple social identities of employees, who experience frequent change, ambiguity, and subjectivity

in their work, provide individuals with the flexibility and resilience required to deal with change, ambiguity and multiple (often contradictory) demands on their sense of self. Multiple social identities also create confusion and ambiguity, hence why they can also be a struggle, as individuals have to continuously make sense of themselves and those around them as they move and shift between their (useful) social identities.

2.10 Identity as resource and struggle

During my first visit I attended a 'creative re-briefing'. Creative briefings are meetings that normally involve one or two Account Handlers (Client Services personnel), an Art Director and a Copywriter from the Creative department and represent a prime example of intra-organizational, inter-departmental interactions within Agency. The meetings are used to share information about what the Client wants in relation to a particular campaign. Prior to a creative briefing, Account Handlers take a brief from the Client initially, the 'client brief', and then transform it into what is known as the 'creative brief'. The 'creative re-briefing' I observed was the third time Agency had been asked to produce the creative work for one particular campaign. Somehow, between the Client having an idea of what they wanted, and the Agency presenting their ideas of what would fulfil the Client's requirements back to the Client, something was going wrong because what the Agency were presenting was not quite what the Client wanted.

The Group Account Director informed me that it was quite unusual to go through this many 're-workings' of the creative brief. The difficulty Agency was experiencing in generating an idea that satisfied the Client is potentially a serious problem for Agency because the ultimate success of a client account is that the people working on it can interpret the Client's wants and needs and translate them into marketing campaigns that satisfy the key decision makers within the Client organization and for which the Client is happy to pay. By rejecting the ideas for the campaign the Client is deeming the Agency's work to be unsatisfactory. This judgement of their work is not only potentially damaging to the self-esteem of those involved in the account, it is also a potential threat to the Agency's identity as being able to deliver the 'intelligent thinking' as demanded by their clients. This situation threatens the reputation and even survival of Agency given the Client's importance to the Agency. Agency

members working on the Auto Account have to figure out how to deal with this problem.

In the process of making sense of this issue, the Group Account Director defines two origins of the problem. It is firstly defined as a problem arising from the fact that Agency 'have to work with ideas of other agencies'. It is secondly defined as a problem arising from the fact that 'the Client keeps changing their mind'.

By defining the issue in this way the Group Account Director is engaged in identity work. By attributing 'blame' outside of one's self, group, and organization – as evidenced from the Group Account Director's comments: "ideas of other agencies" and "Client keeps changing their mind" she is maintaining a positive evaluation of her own organizational-based social identity, and the identity of the organization, because she is defining the causes of the problem as existing outside the control of herself, her team, or Agency. In making sense of the origins of the issue the Group Account Director has used an Agency/organizational perspective. She has acted from a perspective that protects the Agency's reputation as far as she is able.

As well as defining the origins of the problem as residing outside the boundaries of the organization, further identity work is undertaken at different levels within Agency in order to make sense of the problem. For example, some of the senior managers of Agency attributed the blame for the Client rejecting the Agency's work to a misinterpretation of the Client's brand by the Account Team. It is argued that from an organizational perspective it was possible to point the finger of blame at other organizations (the Client, other agencies' work), however, alternative perspectives must be employed when making sense of the problem within the boundaries of Agency.

From within the Team, blame was attributed in several directions – from senior to junior members, and from Planners to Creatives. It is therefore argued that as well as the Agency/organizational level perspective, a group level perspective was applied to the situation. This multiple level view on the situation enabled the Agency employees to identify several different ways of solving the problem. In other words, their multiple social identities created multiple perspectives, which in turn provided the

employees and managers flexible and multiple ways to solve the problem. Thus, although it could be suggested that the participants were engaged in a struggle to define and protect their identities, they were also making use of these multiple and flexible identities to protect the reputation of the organization. Although there is only a fine line between these distinctions, Alvesson (2000) captured the distinction as the difference between existential and task related issues. Such a fine distinction is rarely unpacked, but by applying the integrated approach this is possible and helps to explore the complexity of identity at work.

The organizational level perspective encouraged an outward focus/evaluation of the issue at hand (i.e. Client, other agencies), whilst the group (hierarchical) and departmental level perspectives encouraged an inward focus/evaluation of the issue at hand (i.e. junior members, other departments). The common themes linking the two evaluations are the reinforcement of a positive sense of self (this is the fault of others/identity as struggle), and that the perspectives guide alternative and in some ways contradictory behaviour to help construct multiple level solutions to the problem. This represents identity as resource. I have attempted to summarise this analysis in the table below.

Table 1 – Multi-level analysis of identity as struggle and identity as resource

Identity as resource / framework for making sense		Identity as struggle
Organizational level perspective definition of the ‘problem’	Organizational level perspective ‘solution’	Evidence of identity work / implication for future identity work
The Client keeps changing their mind	New procedures involving standardised written brief and strict deadlines are introduced	Blame is placed outside the organizational boundary – organizational identity remains in tact
Have to work with the ideas of other agencies	Other agencies are invited to present the thinking behind their ideas to provide Agency with a greater	As above, plus Agency is seen to be placing the Client’s needs at the heart of their activities, enhancing a ‘client-

	understanding of how to work with the ideas	focused' identity
Group/team level perspective definition of the problem	Group/team level perspective solution	Evidence of identity work / implication for identity
Within the organization there is a mis-interpretation of the Client's brand.		
Senior management 'blame' junior employees	All ideas to be 'signed off' by a senior member of the team before being presented to the Client	Senior managers retain own professional identity 'we did not cause the problem' Ensure organizational identity is 'protected' by preventing further mis-interpretations reaching the Client
Planners believe the Creatives have misinterpreted the brand	Create a mind map to be used as a tool for conveying the brand	Planners protect their professional identity
Creatives perceive the tight deadlines are to blame	Display a sense of nonchalance – the creative re-briefing has 'bought us more time'	Creatives protect their professional identity

Eventually, the Account Team members present an idea that the Client is happy with and the relationship between Agency and Client is able to progress and develop.

Thus far in this chapter the examples have all been purposefully, intra-organizational. They have drawn from data that is largely related to the multiple inter-department and inter-professional/functional relationships within the research setting. There is one more intra-organizational relationship to consider before moving on to the next

chapter (which focuses on the inter-organizational relationship between Agency and Client). This is the relationship between the Auto Account Team and other Account Teams within Agency. Very little data was collected on the interactions between Account Teams in the context of everyday work. Although this could be perceived as weakness of the research, in terms of its claims to consider the complex role of identity in a knowledge intensive workplace setting, I suggest this aspect reflects the genuinely grounded nature of the research. As there are very few interactions between teams, and my data collection methods meant being led by the interactions of one team within Agency, if they did not interact with other teams, then there was no data to collect. This lack of relationship between the teams, in terms of the role of identity at work, is explored next.

2.11 Auto Account Team – Other Account Teams

The Auto Account Team sit together within an area of the Agency office. The majority of the Team are referred to as ‘100% Auto’, meaning that they work only on the Auto brand. Some members of the Account Team were recruited to the Agency especially to work on the Auto brand, and 18 months later had not worked on any other Client Account. The physical seating arrangements and the fact that the majority of members of the Team worked only on the Auto Account created a sense of separation between the Auto Account Team and the other Account Teams. It was suggested that the Group Account Director maintained the separation of the Auto Account Team from the rest of the Agency because:

“she wants to have people who are solely working on her business as its easier for her to manage...What ends up happening, however, is that as a team we have quite a separate personality from the rest of the Agency” (Planner, February 03)

It was suggested by one of the research participants that as well as the potential benefits there are drawbacks to working this way:

“end up with actually quite a weak product ... she’ll end up with people in the Agency who are just Auto clients effectively... they’ll become just like an Auto

marketing department and they may as well work in the Auto business” (Planner, February 2003)

This extract highlights that the Auto Account Team are dedicated to ‘Auto’ to the point where they are at risk of becoming effectively ‘Auto employees’ themselves. The interview extract specifically highlights the drawbacks of creating and perpetuating a team of people who are dedicated entirely to one Client, that a ‘weak product’ is likely to result, and that the Team may lose its differentiation from the Client itself.

Using the integrated approach, it is argued that this happens because the social identities related to being an Agency employee are being eroded as the identity work of the team is dominated by actions geared toward the Client, interactions with the Client, and Client dominated discourse and narrative – the very ways that Agency employees manage, maintain, and importantly reaffirm their own organizational and other work-related identities. It is suggested that the potential loss of the perspectives guided by the individual’s organizational identity means that Agency employees would no longer be able to provide the alternative perspectives expected and demanded of Agency employees as their complex framework of multiple work-related social identities that they work so hard to construct and maintain can become eclipsed by a dominant ‘Client-based social identity’. This insight highlights one of the most important roles of identity in this workplace. It suggests that the very purpose of Agency, the organization’s identity, rests on and is constructed by the active application of the skills and abilities of the Agency employees to manipulate their multiple social identities in order to ‘switch between’ and ‘think from’ different perspectives guided by different social identities:

“I think intelligent marketing for us is all about understanding both the customer, or the target customer, and the brand, and using data and all the channels to reach them. Now in a big agency that means constructing your team around the client. It means that you have to integrate the different disciplines and viewpoints and bring all of them to bear on whatever brief comes in. So the first thing you do is you need to understand and ask questions and interrogate it, but you interrogate it

from a number of different angles” (Managing Director, London Agency, June 2003).

The perceived separation between the Account Team and the rest of the Agency supports the argument put forward in this thesis that the concept of social identities and identity work are relevant and related and must be considered in juxtaposition when approaching the study of identity in a complex, knowledge intensive organization, such as Agency. The concept of social identity provides a way to see and describe the Team from an identity perspective, as they describe and understand themselves. As a group they share collective goals, purpose, experiences and problems. They are a recognisable and identifiable entity perceivable by themselves and others. The concept of identity work provides a way to see that this social identity is not simply conferred upon the individuals. Instead it is seen as an achievement, borne out of the actions and interactions, discourse and narrative undertaken by these individuals in the name of, or specifically as a member of the Auto Account Team. The more the individuals on the Auto Account Team think and act from a Team-based social identity, the more their Team-based social identity is reinforced.

The issue arising, mentioned above and expanded on here, is that as the individuals on the Account Team engage their identity-related resources, in becoming entrenched in their ‘team perspective’, their view on reality narrows, which can have implications for Agency:

Interviewee: “There can be a danger around almost a kind of cynicism around the Agency creeping in so you can get to a kind of you know ‘if only we could deliver properly to this client and I’m the only one who can manage to do it’. Sometimes you see Client Services people almost taking too much of a client perspective of the Agency but doing this from the inside which can be a bit damaging, rather than really owning the Agency delivery for the client”

Interviewer: “How might that manifest itself?”

Interviewee: “It manifests itself in phrases like ‘there’s an opportunity in there but I didn’t go in and talk to them about it because I didn’t think we could deliver’ ...

Sometimes you get the kind of ‘I’m having to defend the Agency again to my Client’” (Managing Director, June, 2003)

It is important that the people working on the Auto Account Team construct themselves in order to meet the perceived needs of their Client. This has to be achieved, however, in balance with not losing the Agency perspective, or indeed the multiple perspectives that Agency employees manage and manipulate, as this is a crucial part of the Agency’s role in the relationship with the Client. During the research period attempts were made to strike a better balance by organising an Agency ‘away-day’ where all the Client Services personnel attended, no matter which client they worked for, the aim of this being to strengthen the organizational identity of the Agency employees. Toward the end of the research period some Agency members had begun to talk about how the seating arrangements could be reorganised to change the physical barriers between people as a way to encourage cross team communication. These were all attempts to build a more unified Agency identity, as opposed to having multiple client teams working in relative isolation.

SECTION THREE – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has used examples from the data to demonstrate that the concepts of identity work and social identities are both relevant and related in understanding the role of identity in this workplace. It has been argued that the research participants make sense of themselves in terms of social identities, which are created and moved between in order to make sense of problems and deal with challenges. The flexibility in social identities is created through identity work. The point was also made that being able to draw from multiple identities to provide multiple perspectives is a crucial part of Agency’s purpose in the Client – Agency relationship. This chapter has focused on providing examples from the intra-organizational context. The next chapter provides inter-organizational examples to further highlight the complex role of identity in this work setting.

Chapter Six: The role of identity in an inter-organizational context

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the integrated approach is used to explore the role of identity in the inter-organizational relationship between Agency and Auto. This chapter uses evidence from the research to suggest that social identities can be seen as the temporary outcomes, or pauses in identity work, which are used by the research participants to deal with some of the challenges they face in the complex relationship with Auto, one of their most important clients. Discussions within the previous chapter regarding identity in intra-organizational relationships such as identity as struggle and identity as resource, and moving between identities in order to provide different perspectives are considered in their inter-organizational context.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the need and usefulness of the integrated approach to provide a balanced perspective in order to generate insight into the role of identity in an inter-organizational context. In practical terms, insight is achieved by shedding light on how individuals create and use identity to deal with the daily challenges they face in this type of client relationship. The daily challenges faced by Agency employees include striking a balance between immersing themselves in the Client's services, products, culture, and needs, whilst maintaining a distinct 'Agency perspective' and also managing the frequent change, ambiguities, and contradictions that characterise much of the Agency-Client relationship. In theoretical terms, insight is achieved and demonstrated by discussing how the concepts of social identities and identity work might both be used when undertaking an exploratory study of identity in this kind of workplace setting.

Adopting an integrated approach meant recognising that identity at work is both a struggle, or a process during which the research participants carry out identity work to create, develop, carve out and maintain their various work related identities, and it is also an outcome of identity work, whereby social identities as mental frameworks, or

symbolic guidelines for action, sensemaking, and further identity work are created and put to use.

Within this chapter the following arguments are made:

- 1) Client account management requires Agency personnel to have an awareness of and ability to engage in complex identity processes across organizational boundaries.
- 2) Dealing with change, ambiguity, contradiction and generating high levels of trust, in such a complex relationship, requires clever management and manipulation of social identities by the Agency personnel.
- 3) The Client-Agency relationship featured in this research requires Agency personnel to manage an identity-paradox whereby they must maintain a strong sense of their own organizational identity in order to provide a vital 'Agency perspective' whilst also creating and using a strong sense of Client-identity, which may eclipse their organizational identity.

The complexities noted above are brought into sharp relief through the integrated perspective, which draws attention to the possibility of, relevance of, and relationship between social identities and identity work. To reiterate, because the research participants strongly identify themselves with different groups, as they perceive them, throughout the organizational setting, it is useful to draw on the social identity concept when exploring such an organizational setting. Furthermore, as they also engaged in symbolic interactions and discursive practices to shape, change, create, manage, maintain, move between and even feign their identities, it useful to draw on the concept of identity work. The notion that the research participants 'feign' their identities is discussed further in chapter seven, section 4.3.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

This chapter is organised around the inter-organizational relationships within the research setting. Section two contains a brief overview of the relationship between Agency and Auto. It then moves on to consider the different departments' relationship with Auto, with section three covering the Client Services-Client relationship, section four exploring the Planning-Client relationship, and section five

considering the Creative-Client relationship. It is argued that because identities are variously created through interactions and conversations, many of which are shaped and influenced by departmental norms, the different departments of Agency, which create and maintain different relationships with the Client, can be theoretically isolated to echo the relatively well- defined divisions within Agency. Section six moves to a different level of analysis and considers the relationship at the Account Team level, into which the different departmental social identities are nested, and section seven considers the relationship at the organizational level, into which multiple Account Team identities are nested.

It is useful to bear in mind throughout this chapter the paradox of the Agency-Client relationship. This paradox lies in the notion that Agency need their relationship with Client to secure their very purpose, or identity as a marketing organization, however, the characteristics of a successful Client-Agency relationship, and what is required of the Agency personnel to achieve this, puts at risk the very social identities/guiding frameworks which helps the Agency employees to create the relationship. This is why it is crucial that they find ways to manage their identity struggles, and fully utilise their social identities as resources across organizational boundaries.

SECTION TWO – AGENCY-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

2.1 General characteristics

The relationship between Agency and Client in this particular research setting is characterised by extensive levels of contact, both in frequency and number of team members who interact with Auto employees. Products and services tend to be bespoke and much of the work involves the sharing and creation of in-depth knowledge across the boundaries of the two organizations. The Account Handlers in particular attempt to build strong and secure relationships with personnel from Auto, establishing direct relationships between Agency and Client employees:

“a lot of our account handlers have to have that direct relationship with the product managers” (Planner, February 2003)

It is argued that the features of the relationship create a high permeability of boundaries between the Client and Agency. When there is a high permeability of boundaries it has been suggested that clients can have a great deal of control and influence on internal matters of the supplier organization (Swart & Kinnie, 2003).

This is evidenced below:

“...constructing your team around the client...” (Managing Director, London Agency, June 2003);

“I would almost say that the Client sits ‘there’ – (indicating to black symbols on her diagram), almost like a pyramid so they can actually suck on all of the team and they will actually have the relationships right the way across the board. The Client, although in theory are actually filtered through KW (Account Director), actually they will have a direct touch point with all of us. So, if you can imagine that’s an umbrella (black lines on diagram) they (the Client) can actually pull in whomever they at that time want to speak to for a particular area of advice... she can at any time contact any of the team and can be contacted by any of the team to get a particular sign off” (Planner, February 2003).

This culminates in a relationship which is felt to be somewhat overbearing:

“Our Account Team is dominated by Auto” (Account Manager, March 2003)

Evidence from this research suggests that in some ways the influence on practice is mutual in that the supplier (Agency) influences the client work practices as well as the other way round. It is suggested that this pervasiveness into one another’s organizational worlds engenders a sense of shared identity between them. This sense of shared identity is, however, complex, problematic and variable across different parts of Agency. The integrated perspective proposed helps to explore and gain insight into these complexities, as demonstrated on a department-by-department basis next, starting with a more in-depth exploration of the Client Services – Client relationship.

SECTION THREE – CLIENT-CLIENT SERVICES RELATIONSHIP

3.1 Introduction

Client Services personnel manage the day-to-day aspects of the Client Account. They oversee the briefs coming in to the Agency, the work going through the Agency, and ensure the finished pieces of work are on time and within budget. As one Account Manager put it: “we control the process on the Client’s behalf” (Account Manager, March, 2003). Client Services personnel, or Account Handlers/Managers as they are also known, are expected to mould not only their working day, but also their very sense of self, around the demands of their Client and the account they are working on. This malleability of a sense of professional self is an important part of the Client Services personnel’s skills and capabilities:

Interviewer: “Who do you identify with?”

Interviewee “...that’s the nature of being an Account Handler on many accounts over time because what happens is it depends on the emphasis of that account. So some accounts have a creative emphasis ... you do nothing but put pieces of creative through the Creative team ... other accounts would have lots of printing work so you would end up working a lot with Project Managers and it tends to basically reflect who you are working with to deliver whatever the requirement is of that particular Client. So you end up relating to different groups as the requirements of your work changes...If you don’t find areas of commonality it would actually be quite a lonely job, particularly account handling which I think is an incredibly tough job ... hassling on behalf of the client ... always having to say no to people and beg people to do things. So often theirs is the most humble job ... they’re often putting their ego on the line to get things done” (Planner (formally Account Manager)), February 2003)

Account Handlers face complex, identity-related demands as part of their highly involved and complex role within the client relationship. This thesis argues that, in part, these complex demands are met through employees managing their own identity processes. For example, it was observed that the Account Handlers created and maintained *both* a clear separation between multiple work-related social identities, including between themselves and the Client, *and* created a sense of shared identity

with the Client, in order to deal with the complexities of the Client Services-Client relationship. This apparent contradiction is discussed next.

3.2 Contradiction

People who work in the Client Services department are required to meet targets that revolve around what they can achieve for the Client, such as ‘the number of people we bring to the brand ... and the leads generated to test drive’ (Account Manager, March 2003). These client-focused objectives, and the pressure to meet the daily needs and demands of the Client contribute toward making the Client Services department ‘client-dominated’. The characteristics of the Client Services - Client relationship, however, puts at risk the very purpose of the establishing the relationship – for Agency personnel to provide the Client with perspectives on and insight into their brand, products, and marketing of these that they are unlikely to be able to achieve from within their own organization. In other words, the domination of the Client over Agency potentially threatens the distinctive ‘Agency perspective’ that Agency personnel bring to their work, and therefore, to the Client-Agency relationship. In other words, the closeness of the relationship between Client and Agency presents a potential threat to Agency employee’s organizational identity. They risk becoming subsumed into the Client’s way of thinking and doing things, to the extent that they may lose their unique Agency perspective, or ‘go native’.

It is therefore important for the Account Handlers to find ways to maintain a strong sense of their Agency/organizational identity and manage the pressures and potential threats posed to this social identity. Through the use of the integrated approach it was possible to identify two ways that this potential threat is dealt with by the Agency employees. Firstly they engage in identity work to create a shared-in-common social identity with Client personnel. Secondly, they also maintain and work hard to achieve a strong separation between themselves and Client personnel. Although this may appear to be a contradiction, managing their social identities in such a way creates three distinct perspectives from which to act, providing for great flexibility of action and sensemaking, which is crucial to the success of the Client Account. The three perspectives, as guided by differentiated social identities at the organizational level

are an Agency-organizational identity, a Client-organizational identity, and a shared-in-common, or hybrid-organizational identity.

3.2.1 A sense of shared-in-common identity

The socially constructed shared-in-common identity created between Agency and Client generates a new social identity with which both Account Managers from Agency and personnel from the Client organization identify. This shared identity can be described as an inter-organizational team identity, or hybrid-organizational identity. This inter-organizational team identity provides an alternative guiding framework for the individuals working on the account, which in turn provides them with the flexibility to act on behalf of the Client, and make decisions based on identifying with the Client without necessarily compromising their own organizational identity. Empirical support for this argument is presented next:

“we’re the Client’s closest partners and so we do have a strong influence on them. Now they do look to us for direction...In terms of how I would talk to them on a day to day basis, it’s like I would talk to Project Management or Creative in the sense that they are partners and I need them to provide a service”
(Account Manager, March 2003)

The extract above illustrates that this research participant sees the Client as, in some senses, comparable with teams/departments within his own organization. In a similar way that Creatives have an entirely separate identity to Client Services at a team level, but share an identity at the organizational level, it is argued that on an organizational level Agency and Client have entirely separate identities, providing different guiding frameworks for behaviour and representing different social identities or groups with which the individuals may identify. At a team/group level, however, the individuals involved in the Agency-Client relationship construct a shared identity, which provides a guiding framework or social identity different to the separate organizations, but occupying the common ground where the two organizations overlap in terms of some interactions, shared goals and objectives, and commonly held beliefs and values.

The next part of the passage demonstrates how closely interwoven Agency and Client processes can become, contributing toward creating the shared identity:

“I try and work as partners, but there’s the underlying ‘we represent the Client by proxy’, and so do they (other agencies), but we have more of the Client’s trust than they do and they understand that, so we manage them on the Client’s behalf as well...” (Account Manager, March 2003).

This illustrates that Agency employees take responsibility for things that might normally rest with the Client. One of the clearest indications that the research participants create a sense of shared identity between Client and Agency is the ambiguity for the Agency employees around who they feel they work for. In particular, the individuals working in the Client Services department find they must manage various identities in terms of constructing a coherent answer to the question of who they work for:

Interviewer: Why would it be terrible to say ‘I work for Auto?’

Interviewee: “Because its not really true, it is, but its not really true, don’t want to explain the whole story to people when I first meet them. It’s quite a convoluted occupation” (Senior Account Manager, February 2003)

The extract above suggests that the research participant switches between different social identities in order to answer what is a quite a problematic question about who she works for. When asked by someone who she works for, she might say Auto, but she says she would feel terrible for saying it, almost as if she is being disloyal to her own employing organization. It was pointed out by several of the research participants that they might say the name of the Client they work for, rather than their employing organization, as people outside the world of marketing/advertising are unlikely to have heard of ABCDee, but they are likely to have heard of Auto. Furthermore, the research participants feel proud to work on such a well-known and prestigious brand. It is possible that they feel that being associated with the marketing of this particular brand of automotive is a positive affirmation of their professional identity. Importantly, the boundaries between Client and Agency can blur, creating both a resource for joint action/partnership working and the need to engage with the process of identity work as the research participants seek to make sense of multiple, sometimes contradictory, but also sometimes overlapping, social identities. This

example suggests that understanding identity in this workplace as both a struggle and a resource is useful in terms of understanding more about the role of identity at work.

3.2.2 Maintaining a degree of separation

In contrast, as well as building a sense of shared identity with those posing the threat to their organizational identity, Client Services personnel also maintain a separation of identities between themselves and the Client. One way this is achieved is for the Client Services personnel to retain control over the way they do their work.

“I suppose my relationship with the Client is, I was going to say open but it is not because again they only need to know what they need to know, they only need to know how, I don’t know what to say, I keep contradicting myself. They don’t need to know all our internal, or anything perhaps, if something changes we won’t go back to the Client unless we have to. We just need to make sure, we just need to deliver what we promise and how we get there is up to us I suppose, and it’s better for us to do it efficiently so we can make more money” (Account Manager, March 2003)

By maintaining a degree of separation, the Client Services department are able to build and define a strong sense of organizational identity and not become completely subsumed within a Client identity, which is possible given the client-dominated nature of the work. This method of managing the relationship with the Client runs in parallel to building a sense of shared identity and maintaining a separation between the levels of identities, as discussed above. This complex pattern of social identities and identity management processes reveals the integral role of identity in this inter-organizational work context.

3.3 Dealing with change and generating trust

Client Services employees have to deal with a chaotic, and demanding working environment. They are the ‘do-ers’ who have to get on with things and take action, despite feeling like sometimes they do not know what is going on:

“Because we’re so busy and because of the volume of work the Client’s got on that we push through, there are obviously instances where information doesn’t fall down [the hierarchy] as such...but we progress on the basis...things seem to happen and sometimes it’s only after the event when the Client will say they are not sure why something happened so there are instances when things aren’t 100% clear but I think that’s purely because of the quantity and the speed the way things happen and they can change” (Account Manager, March 2003).

Although the entire Agency faces rapid and frequent change, for the Client Services personnel, changes happen on an hourly basis. For example, the Account Handlers are interrupted frequently by the Client, who might change their mind about a piece of work, which can cause disruption and disarray in what is already sometimes quite chaotic work. Such an environment provides both the need and opportunity to engage in ongoing identity work in order to maintain a strong Agency/organizational identity whilst also allowing themselves to have, and reaping the advantages of, a shared-in-common identity with Client personnel. One way they do this is to shift rapidly from an Agency/organizational to a more Client-based identity, thus consciously shifting between possible salient social identities in any given situation.

As well as frequent change, trust also plays an important part within the Client – Client Services relationship. It was a recurring theme within the talk of the research participants which they felt had to be backed-up with actions consistent with generating trust. It also featured prominently in reflections on the Client-Agency relationship during interviews with the Account Handlers:

“Building trust allows you to have some uncertainty because if they trust you they know you will sort it out. Understanding how individuals work will build good relationships which helps when it comes to sharing knowledge and information” (Account Manager, March 2003).

In exploring the theme of trust a separation between individual and organizational level interactions with the Client was apparent, as evidenced in the extract below:

“I think just working with a team of people in the Client who trust our opinion, us as ‘an Agency’ and me as ‘an individual’ and we can work with in quite a, not a sober way, an adult way” (Account Manager, March 2003).

Within this extract, the Account Manager constructs a split between the individual and organizational level in the context of the relationship with the Client. This split, or separation between the employee and the employing organization is an important complexity within the Client – Agency relationship in terms of the way identity is used in the workplace. For example, the separation facilitates flexibility of action and attribution of blame when something goes wrong. When something goes wrong on a Client Account, by constructing a separation between individual and organization in terms of identities, ‘blame’ can be attributed to an individual, for example, but others can ‘step in’ and continue to work for the Client with the organizations’ identity still in tact. This separation also means that an individual can attribute blame to ‘the organization’ and thus maintain the relationship at the individual level. Either way, major mistakes and potential breakdowns in the Client-Agency relationship can be avoided by the Agency employees, usually the Account Handlers, constructing and maintaining a further contradiction of identification whereby they must be seen to have strong sense of their organizational identity but be able to break away and act from a much more individual identity when the need arises.

SECTION FOUR – PLANNER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

4.1 Introduction

Planners are responsible for developing marketing plans and strategies for the Client. As with the Client Services department, Planners also work very closely with the Client, interacting on a daily basis through e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face conversations.

4.2 Identification with the Client

A very close working relationship tends to develop between individuals from the Planning department and from the Client organization, providing a building block for

a strong identification with the Client. This strong identification with the Client enables the Planners to act on behalf of the Client, as they are sometimes required to do. This suggestion is supported by the interview extract below:

Interviewee: “I have had Clients that I’ve identified with very strongly”

Interviewer: What creates this?

Interviewee: “Probably a similarity in personality and values. I’ve worked with some clients who are absolutely passionate about the cause they are working towards and get hugely frustrated by others within their own organization who do not share their passion and commitment” (Planner, February 2003)

Furthermore, the identification is a two-way process, with Client personnel developing a sense of shared identity between Client and Planners, across organizational boundaries.

4.2.1 Developing a sense of shared identity

It is suggested that the close working relationship between Client employees the Agency Planners generates an overlap of ‘Professional identity’. This overlap is created by frequent interactions that enable those involved in the relationship to explore and develop shared values, ‘causes’, and passions for marketing and a market or customer-led approach to their work. Evidence from the Planner-Client relationship supports the argument made above that the marketing personnel of Auto develop a sense of shared identity with Agency personnel, perhaps even more so than they do with others in their own organization. This is evidenced in the extract below during which a Planner is telling me about her relationship with one particular member of Auto:

“she wants to have the buddy buddy chat. I think she is actually quite lonely within her organization. She is ambitious but I think she is actually quite lonely. She has actually eroded herself into quite a small corner personally and she doesn’t seem to have any friends within the organization, people to do lunch with, people to hang out with, people she has a giggle with...

Actual rapport, if you like, with the Client is very strong. She seems genuinely distraught that I'm going, and quite strange about it. Almost as if I'm being disloyal to be going" (Planner, February 2003)

The extracts from the interview with the Planner (above) illustrate that this Planner feels that the relationship between herself and this particular member of Auto provides something to the Client outside of the contractual, client-supplier relationship. The second extract in particular suggests that the Planner felt the Client expected the Planner's loyalty to stretch beyond her own employing organization, to the Client itself. This identification between Client and Agency employees contributes to the blurring of organizational boundaries.

4.2.2 Blurring of organizational boundaries

Agency employees can perceive interactions that transcend organizational boundaries as beneficial. Data from the research suggested that the research participants sometimes acted toward employees from the Client as if they were members of the same organization. This blurring of organizational boundaries is also evidenced in some of the challenges it creates, whereby the relatively clear frameworks provided by the work-related social identities can be obscured, and therefore become confusing for the individual. An example of these is the uncertainty generated regarding responsibility, as evidenced in the extract below:

"If Agency control everything, Auto loses control. Agency is taking on momentum. Auto structure is not customer focused so it is difficult to know who owns what ... Agency is more fluid than Auto but Agency is constrained by the relevant problems Auto have... I have to make recommendations. It would be good if Auto had overall vision but I don't get told the same story. 'Where do I stand?' If I get told by one person, 'great' but another person doesn't like it, my problem is, who do I sell it to? They ask for strategy but there is no budget to implement it. Auto ask Agency to manage budget!" (Planner, February 2002)

Based upon the interview extract above, it is suggested that the blurring of boundaries between the two organizations can make it difficult for Agency employees to 'figure out' the 'correct' action to take in certain situations, which may cause stress and

confusion for the employees. It is argued that the Planner quoted is engaged in identity work through which he is trying to balance a strong Agency/organizational social identity and a strong Client identity. This is discussed further below.

4.2.3 Balancing strong organizational and client identities

An important part of the Planners' job is to develop ideas and 'sell them in to the Client', thus winning new business, or a greater proportion of the Client's marketing work in order to achieve the high growth agenda, as outlined in chapter four. To persuade the Client to adopt a new idea, Planners appear to create a strong Agency-based social identity (Agency/Organizational identity) and a strong Professional/Departmental social identity. In other words, they construct the Agency's targets, goals, and objectives as priorities and take actions that are most advantageous from this perspective. They engage in identity work to maintain a strong organizational social identity as a way to counter a potentially overriding client identity. They must act in consonance with their Agency/Organizational identity and think from the Agency perspective in order to put forward ideas and suggestions to the Client that will increase the amount of money flowing from Client to Agency. This salience of Agency/organizational identity, however, cannot be taken for granted because, as outlined next, sometimes Planners must find a way to engage more fully in a Client-identity and be guided by different priorities.

As well as selling ideas into the Client at a profit for Agency, Planners are also expected to "act as the Client's proxy in meetings". In practice this means the Planners may attend meetings on behalf of the Client and represent the Client's interests. In these situations Planners are required to think and act from the Client's point of view. In these situations, Planners may have to fully embrace an idea put forward by the Client in order to 'sell it' to another Agency. For example, during the research period a new product concept was introduced. The Planners at Agency were expected to lead the development of the branding and marketing of that concept and communicate it to all the agencies that were working with Auto at the time. The Planners were expected to know and understand the concept of the new Auto product *as if they were Auto personnel*. Adopting such a strong Client-identity involves the Planners engaging in identity work in order to create this social identity as part of their identity framework

in order to move from a strong Agency/organizational identity to a strong Client identity. The ideas and views that the Planners were expected to put forward when acting on behalf of the Client, may not be in the best interests of the Agency and yet they may have to defend them to other agencies. This challenge is dealt with by developing a professional/departmental identity that is highly mutable, ‘flexing’ with the daily demands and challenges that have to met by the Planner, and yet consistent, stable and coherent in its flexibility, enabling the Planners to draw from and apply an Agency and a Client perspective, despite some of the inherent contradictions between them.

It is suggested that the insight provided into Planner-Client relationship further illuminates the usefulness of drawing from both concepts of identity work and social identity within the same study. Planners engage in identity work in order to create and move between different social identities so that they can do different, and sometimes conflicting, parts of their work successfully. As with the Client Services personnel who deal with the ‘who do I work for?’ dilemma, these situations can give rise to a dilemma for the Planning employee, as expressed in his interview; ‘Where do I stand?’ ‘Who do I sell it to?’ and ‘it just seems a strange way to use your Agency’. The flexibility of identity is constructed within a relatively stable, strong professional/functional identity.

4.2.4 Switching between different social identities

The above discussion demonstrates that as the Planners attempt to deal with the compelling demands of their Client they find themselves juggling, or shifting between a strong Client-based social identity and a strong Organization-based social identity, which can be reconciled with a strong Professional/departmental-based social identity which guides the Planners to switch between competing organizational-identities according to the situation. In other words, the Planner quoted above feels strongly identified with his own organization, but at the same time, also feels part of, or identifies with the Client organization. I would argue that this research participant feels a sense of loyalty that compels him to take actions that would benefit the Client i.e. (implied) ‘Auto should manage their own budget and I should leave them to it’. He also feels a strong sense of identification with his employing organization, which suggests a different course of action would be appropriate in the situation i.e.

(implied) ‘it is beneficial to the Agency if I have a hand in managing the budget, therefore I should’. It is suggested that this kind of dilemma can be perceived as a potential threat to a coherent sense of self as the individual is forced to choose between two contradictory actions guided by two contradictory social identities, but that the professional/departmental identity enables the research participant to hold and manage such a dilemma.

4.2.5 Benefits of multiplicity and flexibility of identity

Within this research it has been assumed that employees play a large part in regulating their own identities, sometimes in line with management’s attempts to regulate their identities, and sometimes not. Employee control in identity matters is perceived to be facilitated by a multiplicity and flexibility of their identities, autonomy in their work, and the frequency of change and degree of ambiguity throughout the organizational setting. The characteristics present a continuous need and opportunity to engage in identity work. Evidence from this research suggests that rather than be a cause for concern regarding loyalty to the Agency (Alvesson, 2000), the flexibility to switch between the different social identities available to the employee gives him or her the flexibility to carry out their work successfully and may even be associated with a sense of job satisfaction.

The interview extract below shows that in some instances it is beneficial to the Agency, in terms of retaining its experienced employees, to provide the employees with the freedom and scope to act from the various social identities available to them. Managing the conflict that may arise from working so closely with the Client may provide variety, which was seen by this Planner in positive terms:

Interviewee: “The problem I’ve got is that if Auto was to go, Agency has nothing for me.”

Interviewer: Are you linked more to Auto than you are to Agency?

Interviewee: “Yes, more than anyone else. I came from Client side. I am equally happy at Auto as at Agency. I get involved in internal Auto bits and pieces like databases. There is a grey area between consultants and Planner. I am tending to more consultant than traditional Planner. SB (senior manager) is happy with this

as it draws in new business. Agency is happy for me to do this. It's more about who I am. JW is very accommodating about this. It would be hard if I had a domineering Account Director" (DW, Planner, February, 2002)

What is also particularly interesting within this interview extract is the reference to the personal identity – "It's more about who I am". It is argued that this individual makes sense of his complex professional identity by seeing himself as acting as consultant. This enables him to reconcile the potential conflict involved in acting from two contrasting social identities i.e. from the Agency perspective "it draws in new business" and from the Client perspective he is able to deliver more than the basic requirements of the contract i.e. "I get involved in internal Auto bits and pieces".

In summary, it is argued that within the Client-Planner relationship, Planners are expected to juggle at least two potentially conflicting social identities – Organizational, and Client. They do this by constructing a Professional identity associated with being able to switch between different identities. Each provides a different perspective and suggests different appropriate actions. The individual in question engages in identity work to move between and select from which social identity he or she will act, or will retrospectively justify and make sense of his or her actions against the symbolically constructed and interpreted guidelines of a particular social identity.

SECTION FIVE – CREATIVE-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

5.1 Introduction

The 'Creatives' (Art Directors and Copywriters) within the Agency have a complex relationship with Client. Although they do not interact with Client as frequently as the Planners or Client Services, and are less likely to have to deal with demands such as acting as the Client's proxy, they have their own challenges to meet.

5.2 A complex mutual need

The complexity of the Client – Creative relationship can be understood to centre around the notion that Creatives rely on their relationship with the Client, in contradictory ways, to maintain a positive sense of their work related social identities. The nature of the work means that it is often open to interpretation and difficult to measure. The Client has the role of ‘judging’ or ‘evaluating’ the work, upon which hinges the Creatives’ professional esteem, and yet the evidence from this research suggests that from the Creatives’ perspective the Client is not very well regarded or respected in terms of their professional judgement or artistic integrity.

Both the Client and the Creatives have a mutual dependence on the other to define and communicate what is good about one another, thus creating interdependency in terms of perceived success and/or failure. The Client relies on the Creative teams to come up with the ideas, the words, the pictures, and the brochures to tell the end customer how good their cars are, in the case of Auto. The Creative personnel rely on the Client to ‘judge’ their work output as effective, what they want, good, exciting, and worth paying for. The two groups’ potential successes are tied together, but so are their potential failures.

The incident outlined below, illustrating the complex relationship between Creatives and Client, took place whilst I was spending a week with the Creative department. At the time the Creatives were working on an Alcohol brand Client. This incident is included because it illustrates how Creatives use their relationship with Clients to achieve and maintain a positive professional identity for themselves. It also shows the paradoxical nature of the relationship between Client and Creatives whereby the Creatives rely on Clients to give praise and admiration for their work output, yet simultaneously, and thus, paradoxically, also do their best to discredit the Client in order to maximise the distinction between themselves and Client.

The episode in question involved the Creative team preparing for a ‘pitch’. This means they were putting together a presentation of their work and some new ideas to showcase to a prospective client. Pitches are very intense and stressful for those involved. Their work is under scrutiny and will be judged, plus the outcome of the

pitch, whether the account is won or not, will impact upon the entire organization. Time spent preparing them can also be invigorating and enlivening, and if the new business is won, very satisfying for all involved. A pitch is also an explicit opportunity to work on the Agency's identity by presenting a clear image or picture of the organization's collective capabilities, skills, ideas, past experience, knowledge, and expertise.

In this instance Agency were already doing some work for the Client in question and alongside another agency had recently made a pitch to the Client, who was looking to 'refresh' their brand. The Client, however, liked neither of the pitches and Agency were invited to pitch again. The reason the Client gave to Agency for not liking the previous pitch was that they wanted new copy and new images and Agency had not done enough.

Following the failed pitch, many of the Creatives embarked on a verbal campaign to discredit the Client. They told me that the Client obviously did not know what they wanted. They asked for a 'refresh', but what they really wanted was an 'overhaul'. The conclusion drawn by the Creatives is, confirming their previous judgements about clients in general, 'that they do not know what they want and have to be told' (by us, 'the experts'). A positive evaluation of Creatives is therefore made, despite the unsuccessful pitch, because the belief that the Client is always wrong has been reaffirmed. This belief/perspective then allows the Creatives to maintain their own self-esteem, or positive sense of professional identity through a favourable comparison of themselves against the Client, 'who never know what they want and always changes their mind anyway'. The example demonstrates the integral role played by identity in the inter-organizational relationship whereby the Creatives engage in identity work in order to strengthen their professional/departmental social identity, and use their professional/departmental social identity to provide a perspective which enables them to discredit the Client and thus deal with the challenge of the threat to the positive identity of the Creative department.

Whereas the Planners and Client Services personnel attempt to overcome some of the challenges in the inter-organizational relationship between Client and Agency by

engaging in identity work to create a sense of shared identity with the Client and/or shift between the various work-related social identities available to them, the Creatives appear to have a different approach. The Creatives use identity work to create a distance between their identity and that of the Client. Planners and Client Services personnel attempt to identify with the Client, whereas Creatives attempt to ‘dis-identify’ (Pratt, 2000; Humphreys & Brown, 2002b). The Planners and Client Services attempt to overcome some of the threats to their work-related social identities caused by the creation of a sense of shared identity with the Client by holding this contradictory identification as a ‘third’ social identity. The Creatives achieve this by discrediting the Client. A multi-level/multi perspective, integrated approach was vital in generating the insights noted above.

SECTION SIX – THE CLIENT ACCOUNT TEAM-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

6.1 Introduction

The Client Account Team comprises personnel from across the different departments within Agency. This was explained in chapter four. This section provides a team-level analysis of the inter-organizational relationship, but attempts to do so in such a way that the dynamics and complexity of the make-up of the team are not lost. It therefore begins by comparing and contrasting some of the ways the personnel from the different departments created and used identity in order to deal with some of the complexities in the Client-Agency relationship.

6.2 Comparing and contrasting the inter-organizational relationship between different parts of the Client Account Team

The way the Creatives ‘use’ their sometimes antagonistic relationship with the Client to create a positive social identity for themselves, by creating a strong differentiation of social identities between their own and the Client’s identity, can be contrasted to the way the relationship between the Planners and the Client and the Client Services and Client develops. Whereas the Creatives are very keen to stress the differences between themselves and the Client, Planners and Client Services appear to work hard

to find commonalities, create rapport, and find ways to identify with the Client. In all three departments, the individuals involved use their relationship, or their interactions and conversations with the Client to build, shape, and create a positive professional identity for themselves. In a cyclical manner, the identities created play an integral role in helping the Agency personnel to manage the complexities and challenges they face within the Client-Agency relationship.

Each of the departments' relationship with the Client has different characteristics. For example, whereas the Planners are more likely to be described as working strategically *with* the Client to come up with marketing plans, the Client Services department are more likely to be defined as working *for* the Client to meet their day-to-day needs and demands. A second contrast to make is that whereas the Creatives display a certain amount of disrespect toward the Client, albeit backstage, Client Services tend to rely on building respect and trust with the Client and have been known to achieve this by inviting Clients backstage to see how the 'show' is put together. These contrasting characteristics highlight the different ways that identity is used and manipulated by the different Agency employees to successfully carry out their work. The Planners and Client Services do it by developing a 'closeness of identity' with the Client (or at least attempting to portray this, discussed in chapter seven, section 4.3), even generating a shared sense of identity whilst paradoxically maintaining separations. The Creatives, on the other hand, maintain a consistent 'distance' between themselves and the Client. These different ways of using and creating identities can be viewed as identification strategies.

6.3 Client Account Team perspective

Thus far in this chapter separate consideration has been given to each department that comprises the Client Account Team, with a compare and contrast exercise undertaken in the previous section that further accentuates the socially constructed identity divisions within Agency and between Agency and Client. The Client Account Team as whole also has its own unique social identity, within which the departmental and professional identities discussed thus far are 'nested'. In the next part of this chapter I attempt to highlight this collective identity by using extracts from the data where the research participants appear to be drawing from a collective Client Account Team

perspective, rather than their individual departments, or an organizational/Agency-perspective. This team-level represents a further shift in social identity, providing yet another perspective from which to act and make sense.

6.4 Partnership working

At the Account Team level the relationship between Auto and Agency was often described as a partnership. Working in partnership with Clients, as opposed to simply working for them, was considered important by many of the research participants, and is particularly evident in the Auto Account. It is suggested that this partnership discourse and the enacted reality of partnership working, together with the identification strategies discussed above, are crucial foundations for building the sense of shared identity between the two organizations.

As the relationship between the two organizations developed, evidence of partnership working increased, such as the misunderstandings and mistakes made in the early days (as evidenced in the ‘creative re-briefing’ example, chapter five, section 2.10), become less frequent. I have identified several possible explanations as to why Client and Agency form such a close relationship, at the Account Team level, to the extent that it might be argued that organizational boundaries begin to blur, as discussed in section four of this chapter. These explanations, based on a close reading and interpretation of data are listed below:

1. The importance of the Account to Agency
2. Frequency of contact with Client personnel
3. Encouraged to and rewarded for thinking from the Client’s point of view
4. Working only on the Auto account
5. Due to the high prestige of the Client, the Account Team members are happy to be associated with it – being a member of the Auto Team provides them with a positive evaluation of their sense of self

Furthermore, the quote below demonstrates that it is perceived that the success of the two organizations are tied together in terms of satisfying and rewarding work for Agency employees, income for Agency, and selling more cars for Auto:

“I have a team of seven account handlers so I’m responsible for keeping them motivated and enjoying the work, and responsible for delivering the Client objectives, so their business objectives and our budget go hand in hand” (Group Account Director, April 2003).

The next section of this chapter uses an example of how the research participants were able to deal with a persistent issue by creating and using an inter-organizational social identity, at the team-level in order to take what might be understood to be fairly risky actions in the context of a client-supplier relationship.

The issue in question relates to what amounted to be serious concerns that some Agency employees had about one of the Client personnel, who played a central role on the Account. They perceived that what they saw as his lack of skill, ability and qualifications to do his job was hampering their ability to do their job well. Working as closely as they did, and by generating a sense of shared identity at the team level, it is suggested that Agency personnel were able to take the potentially risky step of raising their concerns about the Client employee with senior management within Client. In this instance several remedial actions were taken in partnership between the two organizations, including the employee in question taking a tour of Agency to try and understand the marketing process from the Agency perspective, spending a week with the Account Team at Agency to learn more about the Team and the way it worked, and finally, members of Agency invited to contribute to his appraisal *within* the Client organization.

This situation, and the way Agency personnel dealt with it, illuminates several aspects of the Client-Agency relationship and identity. Firstly, the Agency personnel protect their own organizational identity by once again identifying external factors as to why they are unable to complete their work. Secondly, that the relationship progressed to such a point that potentially risky actions that ‘criticise’ the Client personnel can be taken. Thirdly, that joint action can be taken to resolve what was constructed as a joint problem. This joint action provides some evidence of a sense of shared, and what might even be called a hybrid organizational identity that is built between the two organizations at the team level. Not only does it suggest or point to this sense of

shared identity, it can also be seen to perpetuate it. Fourthly, one of the ways Agency personnel perceive the problem can be solved is for the employee to understand more about the Agency processes. This, it is suggested, turns the relationship between the organizations on its head. It is normally expected and enacted that Agency personnel learn about the Client, but not necessarily the other way round.

SECTION SEVEN – ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

7.1 Introduction

A brief overview of the characteristics of the relationship between Agency and Client was provided in section 2.1 of this chapter. The focus of this section is on how it was perceived by the research participants that the longer term needs of Agency may be compromised by the short-term requirements to meet the needs of the Client.

7.2 A balancing act

There are many complexities that exist between Client and Agency, many of which have been touched upon throughout this chapter. For example, many of the individuals who work on the Auto account tend to work on a single Client Account. This can have a negative impact on how the Agency employees are developed as professional marketers, which can ultimately impact negatively on Agency and its individual employees:

“Sometimes that [working only on one Client] is pulling against personal growth... I’ve talked to the Client Services Director about how we might move people around a bit more” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

The way Agency is organized, however, is frequently justified by the research participants as good reasons for structuring or designing the Agency around the Client because it can be beneficial in terms of meeting the complex needs of the Client relationship:

“I think, theoretically we would move people around a lot more than we do. The problem is, or the issue is, as you can see in a relatively small Agency when someone gains an expertise ... the personal relationships are very very important, people are actually working very closely together... if you move someone too rapidly you can spoil or break that personal relationship” (Commercial Director, April 2003)

As with many of the characteristics of the Client-Agency relationship discussed thus far, Agency employees are engaged in a balancing act often involving paradoxical or contradictory features of the Client-Agency relationship. Examples of these contradictions include the need to meet the immediate demands and requirements of the Client, to build an Account Team which knows the brand well, can create rapport with people within the Client, and who can work well as a team to achieve the marketing objectives of the Client, whilst also paying attention to the longer term development needs of the Agency and its employees. For the Commercial Director, quoted above, this means shifting between an organizational-based social identity that guides his actions one way - ‘theoretically we would move people around a lot more...’, and a Client-based social identity which guides him into acting another way – ‘the personal relationship is very very important, people are actually working very closely together... if you move someone too rapidly you can spoil or break that personal relationship’.

The complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes of the Agency-Client relationship are met with equally complex, contradictory, and paradoxical identity work.

The final data extract provided below evidences the Managing Directors way of making sense of this balancing act:

“need to ensure a feeling of team/membership within Agency for Agency people, but also restructuring so that departments become less important than client teams. Security gained in knowing that what I'm here to do is deliver to the client, as long as I do that I'll be a hero” (Managing Director, June 2003).

Their Agency-related social identity frameworks are maintained in interactions with the Client, achieved and changed through identity work that defines them in various positions relative to the Client, and used as a way to make sense of the Client.

SECTION EIGHT – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an interpretation of the research setting that highlights the differences between the characteristics at the departmental/professional, team, and organizational level within an inter-organizational context. Contradictions and paradoxes, constructed as threats, challenges, and positive affirmations within the relationship have been outlined. The examples taken from the data illustrate the related role of identity work and social identities in both creating and dealing with these challenges and threats, but that within each department identity is used in different ways to meet these challenges and threats. Broadly, the Client Services and Planners work hard to identify, and even create senses of shared identity between themselves and the Client, whilst maintaining a paradoxical separation, whereas the Creatives work hard to create identity divisions between themselves and the Client. At the Account Team level the role of identity was highlighted in terms of partnership working, and at the Organizational level, contradictions were noted in terms of balancing the longer-term developmental needs of Agency with the short-term needs of servicing the Client Account. The following chapter discusses the issues raised so far in more depth.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

So far, this thesis has achieved three things. Firstly, within chapters two and three it proposed and began to develop an integrated approach to the study of identity at work by outlining the theoretical and methodological foundations of such an approach. Within these chapters, characteristics often associated with knowledge intensive organizations were considered and arguments were put forward as to the importance of furthering understanding of identity in these kinds of workplaces. This argument was used to suggest that an integrated approach might be useful when exploring identity in a complex, knowledge intensive organizational setting because it encourages researchers to take a complex and comprehensive view on the subject.

Secondly, in chapter four it described the organization in which this approach has been applied. A relatively comprehensive description of the setting was provided, highlighting its complexity, knowledge intensiveness, and rapid changes. It also demonstrated the strong empirical base upon which this thesis has been built. Thirdly, in chapters five and six, by using data from the case, it laid down a third foundation of the approach – the empirical imperative, and demonstrated the usefulness of such an approach. By presenting an intra- and inter-organizational analysis whereby insight was achieved into the role of identity as both a struggle and a resource an understanding of identity that emphasizes its complex nature as both a process and an outcome has been achieved. By exploring the role of identity as resource and identity as struggle within a multi-level, cross-organizational, empirical study an under-emphasis of the complexity of identity in organizational settings has been addressed to some extent. The implications of this thesis are now considered.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of the insights achieved with this study, discuss the implications in terms of how this thesis has furthered understanding of the role of identity, and consider in more depth the integrated perspective proposed.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

The section following this one provides a synopsis of the key elements and insights from the research, such as the suggestion that social identity and identity work can be considered as relevant and related, that in this particular research setting identity is variously created and used in order to deal with day-to-day challenges at work, and that a multi-level, cross-organizational empirical study provides much needed insight into the complex role of identity in knowledge intensive workplace settings. Section three discusses the implications for understanding the role of identity at work that has been achieved through this research. Section four offers further consideration and suggested contribution regarding the integrated perspective. Section five provides an example from the data of how the different theoretical perspectives used within this research can provide different insights into the role of identity, specifically focusing on the relationship between the Client Services and Creative departments within Agency, and section six provides a summary of the chapter.

SECTION TWO – SYNOPSIS OF ELEMENTS AND INSIGHTS

2.1 Introduction

It is argued that the insights into the role of identity in this kind of workplace setting, generated by this research, were made possible by adopting an integrated approach to a multi-level, cross-organizational boundary, exploratory study of identity in the context of everyday work in a knowledge intensive setting. By beginning with a grounded and iterative research design, the need for an integrated approach emerged through phases of data collection, interpretation and literature reviews, as a way of interpreting what I perceived as ‘going on’ in the research setting. An integrated approach places the concepts of identity work and social identities, which are not normally considered in the same study, side by side.

2.2 Identity work and social identities as relevant and related

Evidence from this study suggests that social identities, as defined by the people who view themselves as parts of teams, professions, departments, and organizations with which they identify, provide a strong but relatively rough guide for sensemaking and action. This supports a relatively widely held view that action is in some way influenced by identity (Beech & Huxham, 2003; Bartunek, 2003). Through symbolic interactions and self-categorization individuals negotiate and connect with the collective values and beliefs of the group with which they identify, and use the identity-related frameworks they create as guides for action in their complex day-to-day interactions. Due to the multiplicity and flexibility of the social identities they create, the research participants were able to construct multiple perspectives, which they use as a resource in their work in order to make different senses from the same situation. Data from the research suggested that these frameworks aided their decision-making and problem solving processes and helped them deal with some of the ambiguities of their organizational world. It is in this sense that identity at work is viewed as a resource, a self-created resource available to individuals throughout the organization, which aids them in carrying out their work. The concept of social identities even with developments such as self-categorization (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and role-identities (McCall & Simmons, 1978), leaves gaps in understanding how social identities are created, changed, and moved between/made salient, which is why the concept of identity work, introduced from a more discursive perspective, also plays an important and related part in understanding the role of identity at work. The concept of identity work applied in this organizational setting highlights that individuals struggle within themselves and with one another to construct coherent, consistent, credible and yet mutable identities across organizational and departmental boundaries. It is in this sense that it is suggested the contribution of an integrated approach is to build a conceptual bridge between those whose main concern is with identity creation and those whose main concern is with the outcomes of identity processes as it encourages a focus on both aspects of identity.

Recognising the two concepts of identity work and social identities, not usually drawn together within the same study helped uncover the complex role played by identity in day-to-day work in this particular organizational setting. A pattern of identity over time was noticed whereby periods of becoming, or identity as a struggle, were punctuated with moments of being, whereby a strong sense of professional identity, for example, would be used by the research participants to guide and justify their actions.

2.3 Words and actions create and change social identities

In order to accommodate an integrated approach a symbolic interactionist methodology was adhered to. This meant that words, text, discourse, actions, physical environment, décor and clothing, for example, were all viewed as symbolic resources. By adopting an integrated approach the various ways that identity was constructed, negotiated, manipulated and reinforced were given attention. For example, a good deal was learned about the way the research participants discursively constituted a dynamic, knowledge intensive organizational identity through their website, promotional materials, and discourse. What was highlighted in certain circumstances, however that was when one paid attention to what the research participants were actually doing, rather than what they were saying they were doing, their heads were down, and the work could be tedious and monotonous. The differentiation of words and actions helped to highlight a difference between ‘claimed identities’ situated within the talk/text and narrative, and ‘enacted identities’ or ‘lived identities’ constructed through symbolic interactions.

2.4 Multi-level, cross-organizational

Many studies of identity at work focus on a single level of analysis, such as organizational or individual. Furthermore, much research in this field is concerned with what managers might do to manage and influence the identification processes of employees, or manage the identity of the organization itself. This single level, managerialist approach (Pratt & Forman, 2000) often leaves unquestioned some important assumptions which need to be addressed. For example, many studies emphasize an organizational-level identity in terms of influencing individual action in

the workplace. This research demonstrates that in an everyday work context social identities other than organizational may be more salient and more influential in terms of how individuals behave, make sense, and interact. These social identities include, for example the team, department, function and profession. This research, therefore, furthers understanding in this field by considering how these different levels of identities are inter-linked, influence, and are influenced by individual behaviour in work place settings.

For example, it was demonstrated that identity at the organizational level as a guiding framework tended to be more relevant to senior managers, or during rare, serious disputes with the Client whereby the research participants would refer to this higher-level identity perspective as a guide (or justification) for their actions. Team level identities played a more central role during day-to-day work when task-related decisions dominated.

Through their symbolic interactions the research participants created differentiated identities between groups within Agency, such as department and team divisions. These processes also served to create divisions between Agency and Client. Paradoxically, the research participants also created shared identities between the intra- and even inter-organizational boundaries, resulting in shared social identities. These tended to create additional guides for actions and ways of dealing with some of the challenges the research participants faced in day-to-day work.

SECTION THREE – IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The space to create an integrated perspective

The grounded approach taken for this research meant that when the fieldwork began, although I was sensitised to some of the contentions of the theories being drawn from I was not familiar with the detail and had no apriori hypothesis to test (Langley, 1999). The prevailing theme of identity emerged during the initial phase of data collection. The inductive, grounded research design meant that I entered the research setting with my eyes wide open, and a general, but not yet detailed or fully formed understanding of the field of identity at work.

As with all research endeavours, ‘the researcher’s pre-understanding and familiarity with theory always affect how she or he makes sense of a research topic (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 968). During the iterative process of exploring identity as an important theme in the research setting and building up my theoretical knowledge about the subject space within the research process was created. This space meant that for a period my view of the research setting was relatively unconstrained by the conventions or assumptions of any particular approach. It was during this time that I observed the research participants defining / creating their identities *and* using the identities they created to provide differentiated perspectives in the course of their day-to-day work. In order to make sense of these observations I used the concepts of identity work and social identities, as each on their own did not provide sufficient theoretical scope to explore and analyse what I had observed, but together they provided an integrated and more comprehensive way of making sense of what was going in the research setting.

The integrated approach, which draws together the concepts of identity work and social identities, provides a way of seeing and researching identity at work that reflects the complexity and dynamism of identity evident in the type of workplace studied whilst also paying attention to the stability and resourcefulness of identity from which people make sense of the world around them. Furthermore, it is argued that this integration is a contribution because as noted by Weick, “‘the contribution of social science does not lie in validated knowledge, but rather in the suggestion of relationships and connections that had previously not been suspected’” (1989: 524)’ (Quoted in Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1026).

This point made by Weick suggests that one way to situate this thesis within the existing literature is to group it within a body of literature that seeks a ‘third direction’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 163) when it comes to understanding identity at work. This third direction does not seek to replace one clichéd understanding of organizations for another (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004), nor does it treat identity as either fixed or fluid. Instead, it seeks to ‘encapsulate the tension between essentialist and constructionist standpoints’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 127) and notices ‘balance in the tension between change and inertia’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 141).

The original approach I have taken is to explicitly consider two concepts not normally considered together, in juxtaposition. The tension between these two approaches is partly resolved by placing these two concepts on the same methodological, ontological and epistemological spectrum (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). A further way to deal with potential incompatibilities, already with to some extent by the data, and under-pinned by Mead's concept of the I and the me, is to view identity at work as a pattern. This pattern is defined by the processes of identity, viewing it as in a state of becoming and a struggle; and temporary pauses in these processes when it can be seen in state of being, and used as a resource from which people make sense. It is argued that this has created insight into the role of identity in the particular research setting studied. It also answers the call to generate dialogue across literatures 'to promote a more integrated understanding of the role that collective identity plays in creating meaning, the form, and indeed the very possibility of organizational life' (Cornelissen et al., 2007: S12).

In the next section of this chapter the integrated approach is explored further by considering how identity might be usefully conceptualised as a fluid framework.

3.2 Identity at work as fluid frameworks

In order to perceive the relationship between identity work and social identities it is suggested that identity is viewed as a 'fluid framework' that is actively engaged by the organizational members as relatively stable and relatively dynamic in different contexts overtime. It is viewed as a framework in that socially constructed definitions of collectives or groups of people, who are recognised by themselves and others in terms of those definitions, create guiding perspectives which influence the way that people act and make sense of the world around them. These social identities, or the way that people label, categorise, understand, and make sense of themselves, becomes an influencing factor in their behaviour. They can be perceived as the rules that we create for ourselves, which, although tend to be adhered to because it feels uncomfortable for ourselves (see the Planner's example in chapter five, section 2.3), or for those around us (see the Creative's example in chapter five, section 2.4) if we do not, can be broken or disrupted over time.

Identity is viewed as fluid in at least two dimensions. Firstly, it is fluid as the definitions of identities, which are created through the interactions and narratives of individuals, change over time:

‘the Chicago sociologists did not conceive of roles as predefined sets of rights and duties that could be donned and doffed as easily as a well tailored suit of clothes. Instead, they subscribed to Mead’s (1934) notion that roles emerge in an ongoing process of negotiation, a “conversation of gestures” during which individuals develop a repertoire of behaviors and attitudes tailored to specific interactional partners (Barley, 1989: 50).

Thus, as the frameworks of identity come into play, so they are altered, adjusted, changed, or maintained. This was exemplified within this research setting through the changing relationship between Client and Agency over time (less mistakes made, creation of a hybrid organizational identity), and in the development of a new professional identity such as in the Planner’s example in chapter five, section 2.5.

Secondly, it is fluid as individuals move between the various social identities available to them in different circumstances, as illustrated in various examples throughout the thesis (in particular chapter six, section 4.2 and chapter five, sections 2.6-2.8). Whereas the first dimension can be seen as identity gradually evolving over time, the second dimension is seen as step change in identity, or shift between identities, which can be taken at a moments notice, both as a reaction to a situation, and/or proactively by an individual in order to make different senses out of a situation. One thing this study has shown is the frequency and rapidity with which people are expected to act from and enact different roles or social identities throughout the course of just one day. It is suggested that it is especially these step changes that require the more discursive understanding of identity such as that provided by the identity work concept. These fluid elements are best understood as processes of identity work, which can challenge the social identity framework itself.

Using an analogy that was used by the research participants themselves, as outlined in chapter five, section 2.8, the individuals wear different hats during the course of a day

whereby the metaphorical removing of one hat and replacing it with another represents adopting different perspectives that stem from the different social identities available to them within a work context. Some of these hats are their own, and sit within their own repertoire, (such as ‘thinking from an Agency perspective’, or ‘from a career point of view’), whereas others are borrowed (such as ‘thinking from another department’s perspective’).

This fluid framework idea constructs a pattern of identity at work whereby the process of identity creation, or ‘becoming’ is interjected with moments of ‘being’, whereby the identity process is paused and an individual stands firmly within a social identity and takes action, makes a decision, or attributes a particular sense to a given situation. In other words, the symbolically created meanings of social identities are created through periods of identity work, or periods of ‘becoming’. As well as periods of becoming, individuals also engage with moments of ‘being’ during which time they take actions from a particular interpretation of a social identity perspective and feel strongly affiliated with that particular social identity at a given time. Individuals then retrospectively make sense of their actions in order to further define, build, and shape the social identity that provided the perspective. In other words, individuals engage in reflection on their actions taken and their interpretations of these actions plays a part in influencing the identity work and the (re)creation of their social identity frameworks.

Social identities and identity work can be seen as linked in a pattern of creating – creation - creating, or becoming – being – becoming. This pattern, which was essentially recognised in Mead’s concept of the I and the Me (1934), discussed in chapter three, section 2.6 of this thesis, is crucial in successfully carrying out Agency work.

The concept of a ‘fluid framework’ of identity can be linked to the exploration that has been undertaken in this study into the role of identity as both a struggle and a resource. This argument is situated within the organizational context of day-to-day challenges at work, which act as a trigger to engage in both identity work (struggling to define who one is), and as a trigger to opt for one particular perspective associated

with a particular social identity, and use it as a resource to guide or justify one's actions. This argument suggests that, in part, identity as struggle can be identity as resource. The constant switching, and shifting between social identities, and the continuous creation and manipulation of multiple identities becomes the useful tool that enables the Agency employees to deal with many of the challenges they face.

3.3 Fragmented and multiple as resilient and resourceful

It has been suggested in previous research that individuals engage in identity work as a way of 'aiming to achieve feelings of a coherent and strong self, necessary for coping with work tasks and social relations as well as existential issues' (Alvesson, 2000: 991) and that 'When hierarchical and technical means cannot prescribe behaviour in detail due to the complexity and organic nature of the work tasks, the self-image and social group(s) through which the worker defines him/herself becomes of great significance' (Alvesson, 2000; 1102). Whilst the evidence from this research supports the latter statement, it suggests an alternative view to the first point made above. Evidence from the current research suggests that rather than aiming to achieve feelings of a coherent sense of self, when it comes to coping with the challenges faced in this particular work setting, the research participants actively seek to achieve feelings of *multiple* strong selves. They then learn to use these multiple and fragmented senses of self to their own and their organization's benefit. They use it to bring multiple perspectives and multi-level solutions to problems, as demonstrated in chapter five, section 2.10. They also use it to differentiate 'levels' so that if a behaviour that is incongruent with one's social identity at one level it may be interpreted as congruent at another, as exemplified in chapter five, section 2.7. The people at Agency are not just engaging in identity work to form a coherent sense of self and presentation of self (Blenkinsopp & Stalker, 2004), they are engaged in identity work to form a coherent sense of many selves and the presentation and manipulation of these selves in multiple situated displays of identity.

3.4 Identity related coping strategies

An integrated perspective provides a way of exploring identity related coping strategies employed by Agency personnel to deal with the frequent change, complex

intra- and inter-organizational relationships, ambiguous work, and potential threats to their identities within the context of their day-to-day work relationships. I have identified three of these strategies, which, as previously discussed can be understood in terms of identity work.

One further strategy Agency members employ to ‘protect’ their organizational-based social identity, so they claim, is to make their Clients believe that they, Agency employees, are more ‘part of’ Client than they actually are, or identify more strongly with the Client than they actually do. In other words, Agency employees engage in identity work to convince their Clients that they have a stronger sense of client-identity than they actually feel. To understand this concept, a dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959) reading can be applied. Agency employees as actors are putting on a show, or passing themselves off as something they are not for their Client-Audience. Props are used such as ‘dressing down’ to give-off the impression of comfortableness with one another. In this way, the actor playing the character, the performer, plays her part with a degree of cynicism, and may present her character with a low degree of self-belief in the character being played (Goffman, 1959).

Alternatively, this concept can be compared to that of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), where employees carrying out customer service work may fake a smile to give the impression of being happy or caring about their customer, but inside they do not actually feel happy. This is called ‘surface acting’. Customers feel that they are getting a better service, employees give the impression they are happy in their work – but these impressions are because of the emotion work that the customer service employees are undertaking.

Agency employees may carry out actions, display behaviour, or engage in narrative that gives their Client the impression that the Agency employee is loyal to them. For example, they will try and find areas of commonality to talk about outside the realm of work. They will flirt, and they will try and find ways to make the Client warm to them. These are conscious acts, deliberate techniques that the Agency personnel employ to give the impression of a strong sense of client-based social identity, without necessarily feeling it. This way, Agency employees are protecting their sense of identity by displaying a certain identity, but hiding another.

3.5 Hybrid organizational identity

The concept of a temporary hybrid organizational identity, which, it has been suggested is created, negotiated, and used between the Agency and Client employees further demonstrates the important role of identity in this kind of workplace. Agency and Client employees create a common understanding of a hybrid organizational identity through their frequent, in-depth, complex symbolic interactions. Joint action and partnership working built from defining common goals and values create an alternative inter-organizational team identity; a multi-level, cross-organizational social identity which is drawn from as way to deal with some of the complexities of their inter-organizational relationships. At these points of overlap, whereby shared values, goals/objective, and professional identities-in-common are generated, Agency employees are able to achieve the balance of ‘getting to know the client better than they know themselves’ without falling for the trap of ‘going native’ and losing their hard earned Agency perspective. Building on Karreman and Alvesson (2001), where they ‘show how the socially shared identity of co-workers is suggested, negotiated, and confirmed in a seemingly task-orientated context’ this research illustrates how employees from across organizational boundaries negotiate and confirm a sense of shared identity between organizational boundaries. Furthermore, it is suggested that this socially shared identity is achieved, albeit against the background of task-orientated setting, ‘knowingly’ and intentionally by the Agency employees.

In other words, the Agency employees achieve a level of sophistication regarding their identity work, which means that they strive to achieve a shared sense of identity between themselves and the Client, whilst avoiding a trade off between their own organizational identity and the Client identity. They work toward a ‘both/and’ perspective that emphasises the common goals, objectives, problems, and successes that are constructed at a point of overlap between the two organizations. This is achieved alongside their all-important Agency, departmental, functional and team identities. This shared social identity provides a third organizational perspective which both Agency and Client employees can use to make sense, and meet the challenges of their intertwining work.

This notion was identified previously by Astley and Van de Ven (1983) who state that

‘as representatives of organizations interact their relationships become infused with shared values that turn sectional orientation into collective orientations’ ... ‘Eventually, managers who continually interact come to share the idea that “these are the ways things should be done.” With this development, norms become dissociated from the specific situations from which they first arose and are generalized to cover broad areas of collective activity’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 263).

This view does not lose sight, however, that ‘organizational parties are both independent actors and involved members of a larger collectivity’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 263).

The integrated perspective draws attention to these interrelations and results of the outcomes of them, i.e. organizational members ongoing identity processes and behaviour, in the context of a contemporary knowledge intensive organization, which has been vital in exploring and shedding light on the complexities of the role of identity in today’s knowledge intensive organizations, such as the creation of a hybrid inter-organizational team identity.

SECTION FOUR – DEVELOPING THE INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Introduction

‘From Weick’s process perspective, theory work can take a number of forms, and it includes such activities as ‘abstracting, generalizing, relating, selecting, explaining, synthesizing and idealizing (1995: 389). The emerging products of these processes may not be formal theories. Nevertheless, they do have a value in summarizing progress made towards understanding a phenomenon, in providing direction for inquiry, and in serving as place markers.’ (Locke, 2001: 38).

The insights gained from doing this research are viewed as progress towards understanding identity in knowledge intensive settings. The integrated approach is viewed as providing a possible third direction for future explorations into these kinds of settings and is defined as an emerging perspective, which has been used as a general approach in this research. Specifically, it draws together the concepts of social identities and identity work and suggests that these are seen as a pattern, or a fluid framework changing overtime, which directs attention to the complexities of the role of identity at work. This approach, or balanced perspective, is particularly useful when studying the role of identity in complex, knowledge intensive, rapidly changing organizational settings as a way of matching the complexity or providing requisite variety of inquiry into the subject being studied.

In relation to the diverse theories they draw from in developing their 'interactionist' approach; McCall and Simmons suggest that:

'In their pure forms...these theories are not entirely compatible in the assumptions they make about mankind, but each does help to explain a different aspect of the total picture. The rich diversity of these theories serves to underline the very lushness of human interaction, a multiplex process containing within itself an astonishing variety of component strands' (1978: 10).

The theories drawn from to propose and develop the integrated approach, although perhaps not entirely compatible, contribute in their various ways to providing a complex and comprehensive picture of identity at work. By exploring points of convergence and commonality the integrated approach provides a balancing perspective on the role of identity at work. It recognises the role played by the socially constructed, but often constraining features of social identity frameworks in place at work, whilst also recognising the subjectivity and potential fluidity of these frameworks generated because of the way employees in knowledge intensive firms interact with, bend, ignore, or are indeed constrained by them. The advantages of such an approach are outlined next.

4.2 A balance of structure and agency/thinking in circles

‘Organizations are continuously constructed, sustained, and changed by the actors’ definitions of the situation – the subjective meanings and interpretations that actors impute to their worlds as they negotiate and enact their organizational surroundings’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 249)

The organizational surroundings enacted by the research participants are largely defined by the organizational members’ struggle with one another and with their Client to make sense of their ambiguous work, blurring organizational boundaries, and strong senses of departmental, functional, team, and professional identities. Individual action is curbed to a certain extent as the research participants engage in extensive, but bounded identity work, based upon their own perceptions of the departments, job descriptions and functions that although are social constructions, are treated by the organizational members as real (Berger & Luckman, 1967). In other words, the socially enacted, symbolically negotiated realities of the teams, departments, and so on are both influenced by and influence the ongoing identity processes of the organizational actors.

‘Most theorists and “managers get into trouble because they forget to think in circles.... Problems persist because managers (and theorists) continue to believe that there are such things as unidirectional causation, independent and dependent variables, origins and terminations” (Weick, 1979; 52)’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 267).

Moreover, just investigating cause and effect may ignore the ‘process by which the loops in the circular relationships unfold’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 267). The integrated perspective is one way to think in circles by conceptualising a pattern of identity at work, which helps to conceive identity as unfolding in the struggles of everyday work, yet also utilised as meaningful, but fluid frameworks to bring order and sense to everyday work.

4.3 A third perspective

The integrated approach brings together the two concepts of identity work and social identities. It does not argue for them to be interwoven, more that they can be viewed side-by-side, holding hands, working in partnership, whilst ensuring that the value of both concepts as separate is not compromised. Furthermore, the integrated approach does not argue for an integration at the theoretical perspective level, broadly grouped as socio-psychological and discursive perspectives for the purpose of this research. Rather, it proposes a linking at the concept level, building a small bridge, or area of overlap between the two. Each is still able to offer an alternative view to the other, whilst also being able to work together to provide a new way of looking at the world. This dynamic perspective mirrors the Agency – Client relationship, whereby each organization maintains separate identities, and yet in various ways through their component parts (teams, departments, individuals) they find ways to integrate their separate identities in order to provide alternative perspectives. The very purpose of Agency personnel in the Agency – Client relationship; to be ‘part of’ the Client, but without losing their unique ‘Agency perspective’, is echoed in the integrated perspective that has grown out of the study of this particular Agency – Client relationship.

To expand on this point, it is argued that by combining in some aspects (i.e. between certain departments of Agency and Client) to create a hybrid organizational identity, the Client nor the Agency lose the value of their individual Agency or individual Client identity. Instead they find ways to move between their multiple social identities, including ones that span organizational boundaries. The integrated perspective used and developed through this research, does not argue for a permanent combining or fusion of the two approaches as the individual value of each must be retained. In other words, the integrated approach does not argue for one combined approach, it advocates the choice of three. As within the research setting whereby the Agency employee must find ways to move between the different social identities/perspectives available to him as way to deal with the challenges of the complex organizational world in which he operates, the researcher who is studying this complex world must be able to move and switch between the different theoretical perspectives available to her in order to explore, understand and theorize about the

complex organizational world she studies. The integrated perspective is a way to provide the requisite variety (Ashby, 1962) needed to study the complex role of identity in contemporary organizations through exploratory, grounded longitudinal research.

The next section of this chapter provides an observation from the data as a way to highlight the differences between the insights prompted by the alternative theoretical positions considered, and to demonstrate the value of the integrated perspective.

SECTION FIVE – DEMONSTRATING THE DIFFERENCE

5.1 Demonstrating the difference

The observation I am focusing on is the intra-organizational relationship between Account Handlers within the Client Services department (Client Services/Account Managers) and the Art Directors/Copy writers within the Creative department (Creatives). This relationship is characterised by frequent and complex interactions between individuals, and diverse approaches to work and to the Client. Client Services appear to assume that Client's needs are paramount. Creatives appear to treat the clients with a degree of disdain and instead emphasize the importance of their work output in terms of its aesthetic appeal and adherence to their 'professional' interpretation of the creative brief. For the purpose of this exercise five relatively distinct extracts from the data are utilised. These are summarised below.

5.2 The data

5.2.1 *The interview extract*

Interviewee: "We're the centre, not that everything revolves around us because it doesn't but in a way it does. It's quite hard to describe that, we're the facilitators, we're not the um I don't want to say we're the most important part, but ...

Interviewer: What would you say?

Interviewee: "We obviously make things happen. If we didn't bring briefs into the Agency we wouldn't generate any money so Project Management or Creative

or the Client wouldn't get anything done, so in that sense we are key" (Account Manager, March 2003)

5.2.2 *Not sharing creative ideas*

Occasionally Client Services personnel will have what they call a 'creative idea'.

This means they have found a way to answer the 'creative brief' designed for the Creatives to answer. The Account Handlers tell me that they are reluctant to share these ideas with the Creatives for fear of 'treading on their toes' or eliciting a defensive response.

5.2.3 *The suit-wearing Creative*

I was told that the wearing of suits by one of the Art Directors resulted in unfavourable responses from other Creatives who saw this action as not really being a 'Creative' (who normally wear jeans). The employee in question was gently ridiculed for not conforming to their non-conformist ways. It was suggested by one of the research participants that the Art Director secretly wanted to be an Account Manager, which was why he dressed in a suit – to be more like them.

5.2.4 *The Agency Perspective*

During one particular campaign, 'the Desire-Range', a major disagreement between Agency and Client relating to the use of certain images within a brochure resulted in the Client Services department identifying with the Creatives, *against* the Client, which was a very rare event.

5.2.5 *Annoyance at treatment of Client*

Creatives get annoyed with Account Handlers for not managing the Client in the way they think they should (e.g. Account Handlers should 'stick up' for the Agency more). Creatives are prepared to say what they think. They like to be thought of as 'devils advocate' and feel this is their role. (From field notes based on observations during extended visit to Creative department, 18-03-03)

The Creatives and Account Managers work very closely together and generally the relationship between them is convivial. There is, however, some evidence of underlying friction, which can be explored in identity terms. This is done next, using

the three theoretical positions outlined in this thesis to interpret the interactions between the Creatives and Client Services, as exemplified in the data extracts above.

5.3 The socio-psychological/traditional approach

From a socio-psychological perspective, ‘identity is fundamentally a relational and comparative concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1985)’ (Gioia, 1998; 19). From this perspective it is important to pay attention to the inter-group comparisons taking place. For example, from the interview extract (section 5.2.1) it is possible to point to how the Account Manager contrasts the Client Services department with the salient out-groups of the Creative and the Project Management departments and does so in a way that evidences bias in favour of the in-group. He sees the Account Management department as ‘key’ to getting things done and that without them, others within the organization, would not be able to get anything done. This enables a positive evaluation of the salient social identity – the sense of belonging to the Client Services department.

A further assumption of this approach suggests that ‘social identification leads to activities that are congruent with the identity’ (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 20). In other words, this approach suggests that the Creatives and the Account Handlers interact in the way they do *because* of their identification with their respective departments. For example, Creatives express annoyance at the Account Managers for identifying too strongly with the Client, whereas they, the Creatives, are ‘prepared to say what they think’ (section 5.2.5). The identifications can be seen to guide the Creatives to expressing their annoyance as this is congruent with a Creative-identity. Similarly, Account Handlers are reluctant to express creative ideas because it would not be congruent with an Account Handler identity (section 5.2.2). From these extracts from the data it is possible to perceive how identification can be seen to influence actions (Bartunek, 2003), which in turn can reinforce the antecedents of identification such as the salience of out-groups and a positive bias for the in-group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

From this perspective the strongly held and well-reinforced work-related social identities enable and even encourage the Account Managers and the Creatives to

engage in inter-group comparisons, each using the other as the salient out-group. This can reinforce a positive sense of self, achieved by fulfilling a specific role within the organization as a member of a particular department. In this sense, identities and identification can be seen to bring order and purpose to the Client Services-Creative relationship, playing a stabilising role in the workplace and in relationships between colleagues despite potential tensions and conflicts due to their diverse approaches to work and the client. This is because the expected behaviour flows from the respective identifications.

Identification with their departmental identities can be seen as the framework from which individuals can make sense of themselves and one another within the workplace. This framework is seen to guide and even constrain behaviour such that Creatives do not wear suits (section 5.2.3) and Account Handlers do not share creative ideas (5.2.2). When an individual deviates from his or her accepted social identity the sanctions of others, such as ridicule and defensiveness (also guided by the identity framework), serve to curb their actions and behaviour accordingly.

From this perspective it can be suggested that the Creatives and the Account Handlers hold a view about how each should act in the context of their day-to-day work. They also hold views regarding their own role *as* Creatives or *as* Account Handlers influenced by the cognitive segmentation an individual undertakes to make sense of him/herself and others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This reading suggests that the relationship between the Creatives and the Account Handlers is evidence of identification influencing perception and action. Thus their respective departmental/professional identities are seen to provide a framework, or rough guide for action, that is deemed to be appropriate for a member of a particular group, such as a 'Creative' or an 'Account Manager', by actor and audience.

5.3.1 The benefits and shortfalls of a socio-psychological/traditional approach
Drawing from social identity theory can be beneficial in terms of highlighting how individuals make sense of themselves. The act of categorising/classifying the research participants according to their work-related social identities as defined by the research participants, aligned with how they made sense of themselves and situated themselves within the organizational environment. The Account Managers and the

Creatives see themselves as distinct groups fulfilling separate, albeit interwoven roles. A socio-psychological approach can help to identify and uncover the socially constructed reality within which research subjects interact as it can draw attention to the categories the research participants themselves use to define and make sense of themselves and one another.

There are also several ways in which a socio-psychological approach may hinder exploratory research into identity in the workplace. The somewhat restricting assumptions and emphases of this approach are briefly touched upon here. A socio-psychological approach tends to assume an essentialist notion of identity/identification. This means that when focusing on the Client Services – Creative relationship the multiplicitous and fluid nature of identity can be obscured, and in particular, the struggle to secure identities in ambiguous and frequently changing settings may be overlooked. Drawing from the interview extract above (5.2.1), the data indicates a degree of uncertainty regarding the interviewees' departmental identity. It is suggested that exploring the struggle to achieve identities is just as important to understanding the role of identity in the workplace, as are the identities themselves, and the inter-group comparisons evident within the same interview extract.

The socio-psychological approach also under-emphasises and under-specifies how social identities are created. Being concerned with the antecedents and outcomes of social identification assumes the social identities themselves are a given, which can result in the creation processes of social identities being given scant, if any, regard. A symbolic interactionist reading of the theory, however, finds this position to be unsatisfactory because social identity frameworks are created in the symbolic interactions between people, thus many questions related to the relationship between the Account Managers and Creatives remain un-asked, let alone unanswered. For example, how does one come to understand him/herself as a Creative, or an Account Manager in the first place? How can one explore and account for the apparent shifting or switching between identifications, such as moving from a departmental to a team to an Agency perspective (section 5.2.4)?

To better understand and explore the multiplicity, fluidity, and complexity of identity within the context of the Creative – Client Services relationship, an alternative reading of the data is now offered.

5.4 The discursive/alternative approach

Discursive approaches assume identity to be ‘in a permanent state of becoming as various social and linguistic constructs (or discourses) vie with one another for supremacy’ (Thomas & Linstead, 2002: 75). From this perspective the research focus is on *how* identities are constructed. Furthermore, discursive approaches introduce the concept of identity work, which emphasizes that identity is something that has to be worked at and fought for. Through such a reading, different aspects of the Creative – Client Services relationship are illuminated. These are explored next using the same set of examples above.

Returning to the interview extract above (5.2.1), the alternative approach suggests that the Account Manager is discursively creating his identity as a member of the Client Services department – in the context of the interview – by defining the identity of the Client Services department as ‘the centre’, and ‘the facilitators’ who ‘make things happen’, and are ‘key’ to the Agency operations. Applying the alternative approach to explore the non-sharing of creative ideas by the Account Managers (5.2.2) it is suggested that this ‘non-action’ contributes toward the creation of the Client Services departmental identity. A structural/framework assumption is replaced by a human agency/fluid assumption regarding how the Client Services and Creative social identities are created. Rather than behaviour being guided by identity, identity is created by ongoing linguistic constructions between people. Through their interactions with the Client Services and Creative personnel create the very social identities by which they define themselves.

Whilst it is usually the case that the Account Managers will apparently identify with Client to the extent their own organizational identity may be at risk, placing the Creatives in the role of other, there are circumstances when the Creative and Account Managers strongly identify with one another *as* Agency employees, casting instead the Client in the role of other (section 5.2.4). Discursive approaches draw attention to

these complexities and ask how such fluidity of identity is achieved. Thus, rather than assume the relationship between the Account Managers and Creatives is a relatively fixed and consistent set of interactions guided by a framework of understanding related to what it is to be a Creative or an Account Manager, it is assumed that the Creatives and Account Managers are continuously adjusting to one another and their complex organizational setting in an ongoing effort to define and create mutually acceptable, but continuously shifting definitions of one another.

Work attire can be viewed as a form of narrative through which individuals and groups create and negotiate their multi-layered identities (Humphreys & Brown, 2002a). The suit-wearing Creative (5.2.3) highlights insights provided by a discursive reading of Creatives – Client Services departments. The response of his fellow Creatives to him wearing a suit to work suggests that individuals attempt to influence the stories told by others that impact on their own sense of identity. Furthermore, the adverse reactions were couched in terms of the distinction between the Client Services and Creatives. Maintaining the distinction through the medium of work wear imbued with symbolic messages seemed important to the Creatives. From an alternative approach one tends to focus on how the respective identities are created, negotiated, and maintained through interwoven narratives of emergent identities. There are no hard and fast rules, no definitive groups against which inter-group comparisons can be made, and no frameworks or structures to maintain the distinctiveness between the Creatives and Client Services. Instead the distinctions are continuously created, threatened, fought for, and negotiated as part of the daily discourse, conversation and narratives of the people who define themselves according to their own interpretations of the departmental groupings. The tensions between them arise from the perceived threat that one's sense of worth within the organizational setting could be compromised by perceived others if not protected and fought for – especially in the ambiguous and rapidly changing setting of every-day Agency work.

5.4.1 The benefits and shortfalls of a discursive/alternative approach

The advantage of exploring the role of identity in the Creative – Client Services relationship using a more discursive approach is that it brings into focus the interactive processes of identity formation that exist within and between the two groups. Defining the social identities themselves becomes problematized, and all

identity claims and identification processes become subject to the efforts of individuals and groups to engage in on-going identity work. This approach, therefore, draws attention to different aspects of the relationship between the two departments, such as how their inter-actions and inter-talking create the temporary groupings with which they identify. The not sharing of creative ideas by Account Managers and the not wearing of suits by Creatives, and the describing of the Account Managers as 'key', 'centre', 'facilitators' and so on constitutes the identities as opposed to being the result of them. This approach therefore highlights the complexities of the relationship between the two groups and the fluidity and potentially precarious nature of their respective departmental identities.

A potential drawback to using a discursive approach alone is that the importance of their social identities as a way to make sense, provide perspective, and guide action such that it can be viewed as relatively 'crystallised' (Beech & Huxham, 2003) can be lost due to the focus on identity creation processes. Thus, when the Creatives respond in a negative way to their fellow Creative wearing a suit to work, or when the Creatives express annoyance at the Account Managers for failing to take an Agency perspective, they have acted from a particular perspective. This moment of retrospect/reflection, an important, albeit fleeting role, played by identity in this work setting, may be overlooked from a purely discursive perspective.

The integrated approach, considered next, attempts to draw together aspects of the two approaches in order to provide a more complete picture of the role of identity in the Client Services – Creative relationship.

5.5 The integrated approach/third perspective

The integrated approach is a form of theoretical pluralism (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983). The two approaches considered thus far are brought together in order to overcome some of the shortfalls and to reveal more about the role of identity. The integrated approach perceives identity as both a creation process *and* an outcome of those processes, which are coupled together in a cyclical relationship. This approach, therefore, provides for richer, more complex readings and interpretations of the data than can be achieved by the socio-psychological or discursive approaches alone. For

example, the annoyance expressed by the Creatives when they perceive that the Client Services personnel are becoming too entrenched into the Client's way of thinking (5.2.5) can be seen as both guided by their perceptions of how Creatives and Client Services personnel should act, *and* contributes toward a strengthening of that perception. It is both evidence of strong social identities and identity work.

Furthermore, an integrated approach not only highlights the processes whereby the social identities are reinforced, strengthened, confirmed and so on, it also focuses on the identity creating processes in terms of how changes in identification can be seen to occur. In the context of the Client Services – Creative relationship, a clear example of this is how the shift is made from a salient departmental identity to a salient organizational identity, as demonstrated in section 5.2.4. In this example the integrated perspective not only asks *how* the transition is made (i.e. through symbolic interaction and discursive means), it also asks *what* is the result of the shift (i.e. how do the research participants think and act differently when guided by an Agency perspective rather than a departmental perspective)? In this instance the Client Services personnel talk in derogatory terms about the Client and behave in a more unified and cohesive manner with the Creatives.

An integrated approach conceptualises that identity frameworks enacted by the Creatives and the Account Managers are largely defined by their struggle within their own groups, and with one another, within the context of the relationship with the Client, to make sense of their ambiguous work, potentially blurring boundaries, and strong senses of departmental, functional, and professional identities. Their interactions, and interpretations of these, bring about and can reinforce the social identities by which they define themselves, but they can also change them.

5.5.1 The benefits and shortfalls of an integrated approach/third perspective

An integrated approach encourages the researcher to take notice of both the process of identity work and the relatively fixed, although problematic notion of work-related social identities. The integrated perspective is one way to think in circles (Weick, 1979: 52) by conceptualising a pattern of identity at work, which helps to conceive identity as unfolding in the struggles of everyday work, yet also utilised as meaningful, but fluid frameworks that bring order and sense to everyday work. In

other words 'being' a Creative or 'being' an Account Manager is recognised as being both influencing and influenced by the 'becoming' of the respective identities.

A further advantage of the integrated approach is that it adheres to how the research participants made sense of themselves in the context of their day-to-day work. Exploring the relationship between the Creatives and the Client Services department from a symbolic interactionist perspective meant that it was crucial to try and understand it from their own perspective. A socio-psychological approach helps this endeavour by drawing attention to the way the research participants categorise and classify themselves and one another. An integrated approach does not, however, focus on this aspect of the role of identity at the expense of exploring the complexities of the departmental identities and how they are continuously worked at, defended, constructed and moved between in the course of day-to-day work. Without this dual focus it would have been difficult to notice how the Creative and Client Services spend a great deal of their time defining the boundaries between their departments, and yet will completely redefine (obliterate) these boundaries in the face of a major disagreement with the Client/threat to their shared-in-common Agency/Organizational identity.

The relationship between the Creatives and the Client Services department at Agency is incredibly multifaceted. In the context of their frequent interactions with one another and their complex relationship with the Client there are many opportunities to engage in identity narratives and there is frequent evidence of engagement with inter-group comparisons. Both groups appear to define themselves according to their respective departmental identities and will undertake identity work to defend these, and yet are able to switch rapidly to an Agency perspective and identify with one another with apparent ease, in some circumstances. By taking the three different approaches outlined above to explore the relationship between the two departments, it is argued that more can be learned about the complexities of the relationship and the role of identity within it than could be learned by using just one.

SECTION SIX – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

By using an integrated approach, the struggle of identity can be explored side by side with the outcome or achievement of identity – and by attempting to understand more about both of these ‘states’ within the same study we can understand more about identity at work generally. An integrated perspective assumes that individuals are both influenced by and influence the groups to which they feel they belong.

Furthermore, an integrated perspective sees social identities not as conferred groupings but as an enacted and utilised framework of categorisations that can be changed and moved between. If ‘the interplay of organizational theories is really a contest over the future shaping of the organizational world’ (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983: 269) then an integrated approach to the study of identity at work shapes an organizational world that is understood to be dynamic, complex, frustrating and rewarding.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

SECTION ONE – INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

1.1 Introduction

This study, and many others that have come before and since, leave little room to doubt that identity is an important feature of work life. It plays a crucial part in how individuals make sense of their work, their clients, one another, and their own sense of self within a work context. From both theoretical perspectives used within this research, identity at work is increasingly recognised as complex, multiple, and diverse both within and between organizational boundaries. By exploring identity as a dynamic pattern involving both the creation and use of multiple work-related social identities this study offers insight into the role of identity in a day-to-day work context, both within and between organizational boundaries. Appreciating that individuals throughout an organizational hierarchy engage in identity work to create, manage and define their work-related social identities, *and* make use of these as a resource for decision-making and dealing with challenges at work contributes towards addressing certain gaps in the identity and organizations literature regarding the need for multi-level, cross-organizational, empirical studies and furthering understanding of the role of identity in frequently changing and ambiguous work contexts by generating a constructive dialogue between literatures.

In order to draw out an understanding of identity in states of both ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, or resource and struggle, discursive and socio-psychological approaches were brought to bear. A key contribution of this study lies in the juxtaposition of the concepts of social identity and identity work, which are not usually used within the same study. This addresses a further gap in the study of identity highlighted by Cornellissen et al. (2007) in their call for a dialogue across literatures. Further contribution lies with the empirical demonstration of the complex role of identity, which is often underemphasized in studies of identity at work from a more socio-psychological perspective. In particular, it has been shown that the multiple, fragmented, and negotiated social identities, normally understood as a struggle for

individuals at work, can also be a resource in knowledge intensive, ambiguous work that requires the organizational members to bring multiple perspectives to bear.

This thesis puts forward an original way of looking at identity at work by drawing together the concepts of identity work and social identities. This dual focus on the process and outcome of identity at work is named as an ‘integrated approach’. It is put forward that this approach balances the need to view identity as dynamic, multiple, and sometimes a struggle within the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary work life, with the need to view it simultaneously as a means by which individuals deal with the complexities and challenges within their everyday work life. This approach was particularly fruitful in exploring, for example, how the research participants variously managed the relationship with Client, simultaneously creating a shared sense of identity, and engaging in identity work in order to distance themselves from the Client. It has been suggested that in this way identity can be viewed as a struggle and a resource, a process and an outcome, or a fluid framework within the context of a complex, contemporary knowledge intensive organizational setting.

In summary, the integrated perspective highlights two different aspects or sides to identity at work, the ‘being’ and the ‘becoming’, both of which are important in understanding the role of identity at work, especially in rapidly changing, frequently ambiguous, client dominated organisations such as the one studied.

1.2 Purpose of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions to this research by discussing its scope and generalisability, and assessing its contribution to the field of identity and organizations. This chapter also provides an evaluation of the research and briefly considers further research opportunities.

1.3 Structure of the chapter

Following this introductory section, section two of this chapter outlines the scope and generalisability of the research. Section three offers a discussion of the contribution,

and section four provides an evaluation. Section five suggests opportunities for further research.

SECTION TWO – SCOPE AND GENERALISABILITY

2.1 Introduction

The data collected during this study is a longitudinal slice of the everyday work activity of an Account Team. As discussed in chapter three, the research is not strictly speaking a ‘case study’ as the research topic is the role of identity at work, rather than the Account Team itself. It does contain, however, many of the characteristics of a single case and therefore a review of the scope and generalisability of the research can be usefully framed by asking, and attempting to answer the question; ‘what can be learned from the single, with reference to this particular research, ‘instrumental’ (Stake, 2000), or even ‘extreme’ (Pratt, 2000) case study?’

Several of the aims laid down at the outset of this research have been achieved by conducting the research in this way. Its grounded and inductive design, together with its symbolic interactionist underpinning meant that the study paid close attention to how individuals make sense of themselves, those with whom they interact, and their work in a complex organizational setting. Furthermore, insight has been achieved into the role of identity in the research setting from which the data was collected. For example, evidence suggests that the people in this organization use identity-related coping strategies to deal with the threats to their organizational identity. The evidence also suggests that the people in this organization engage knowingly and purposefully in identity work in order to manage certain aspects of their work. Noticing these complexities, subtleties and diversities in the role of identity was facilitated by the nature of the research, with the quality of wholeness being achieved as the data collected during the observations and informal conversations followed the multi-level, cross-organizational interactions of the research participants.

The setting in which this research was carried out played a supporting role in order to explore the identity related issues within this context and develop insight into these. Although the research setting as a whole provided a supporting role, the contextual

features of rapid change, knowledge intensity, subjective work output and pervasive client relations were central in generating these insights and developing the arguments for an integrated approach.

The symbolic interactionist view and methodology that flowed from it adopted for this research resulted in vast amounts of data being generated as I endeavoured to explore and make sense of the organizational context from the point of view of the research participants. Observing them in their day-to-day work alone would not have been enough to delve into their meaningful world as it would not have enabled me to explore how they were interpreting and making sense of what was going on. Equally, recording what they told me about what they did in their day-to-day work alone would not have enabled me to get a handle on how they handled those meanings in encounters (Blumer, 1969). Consolidating the observations and the interviews with the shadowing exercises and the extended visits enabled this research to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the research setting and the topic of interest within it.

Despite my best efforts to diligently gather data and describe the case meticulously, it is not possible or preferable to outline the research setting in its entirety (Stake, 2000). The data has been reported in such a way to convey a sense of what the organization was like both as a place to work for the organizational members, and as a place to do research into the role of identity and that much can be learned, if not necessarily generalised, from an in-depth study. What might be learned is explored next using Thorngates' (1976) model regarding tradeoffs between generalisability, accuracy, and simplicity of research (Langley, 1999) and its outcomes (Weick, 1979).

2.2 Accurate and simple

Guided by Thorngate (1976) and Weick (1979), Langley argues that 'any research strategy demands tradeoffs among accuracy, generality, and simplicity' (Langley, 1999). It is argued here that by grounding the insights in the data an accurate interpretation of the role of identity in this particular research setting has been reached. By this I mean that if this thesis was presented back to the research participants they are likely to recognise their identity-related activities within it. The

insights are firmly grounded in the empirical material. In terms of simplicity, it is suggested that although the concepts of social identities and identity work are complex concepts in themselves, their relative emphases on identity as resource/outcome and struggle/process respectively achieves a simplicity in terms of how the integrated approach can shed light on the role of identity at work. For example, it is proposed that they can be seen as related in a pattern of creating – creation – creating overtime. Simplicity has been maintained by introducing and exploring the concept of a ‘fluid framework’ of identity as way to capture the balanced perspective achieved.

Claims of generalisability are limited to what has been learned from secondary sources that were used to learn about Agency-Client relationships in a broader sense, and what was learned from the research participants as they recounted previous experience. The understanding gleaned from these sources was sufficient to understand the research setting in the wider context of the marketing sector at the time of the fieldwork. It is suggested, however, that the research in hand does not allow us to say too much about the role of identity at work beyond the kind of organization studied, and as in-depth study of a single, albeit multi-level, cross-organizational setting, this was not the point of the research. It does, however, point to the importance of understanding specific settings in some depth (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It also leads to a suggestion that further research into the role of identity in similar cases could test the potential generalisability of the insights generated from this study. Furthermore, the limited development of an integrated approach or balanced theoretical perspective achieved within this study could be, further developed and tested to see if it has application on a more general level.

As an approach to other research settings, it is suggested that the integrated approach has scope to provide a balanced perspective between identity work and social identity, which could be usefully applied in other work settings. It is suggested that this is an important step to take because, as organizations become increasingly complex, ambiguous, and subject to significant change; as their boundaries blur and relationships between organizations becoming increasingly complex and negotiated; and the need and opportunity to engage in identity processes abound, researchers need

complex and dynamic frameworks and perspectives to explore the organizational settings and the identity processes within them.

Finally, on a note about generalisability and scope, the following point was made by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003), and can be applied to the study in hand:

‘One can, of course, argue that the specific empirical domain covered in this article does not allow us to say too much about [the topic in hand] on a general level. But no in-depth study can do that, and the results of this study point to the importance of understanding specific settings in some depth’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003: 981-982).

The research in hand does not allow us to say too much about the role of identity at work on a general level, and as in-depth study, this should not be expected. It does, however, point to the importance of understanding specific settings in some depth, and in the case of this thesis, lead to the proposal and development of an original approach which could be applied on a more general level.

SECTION THREE – CONTRIBUTION

3.1 Introduction

There is a theoretical, empirical, and practical contribution made by this research. A theoretical contribution is made in the proposal, development and application of an integrated approach, which is operationalised by explicitly drawing together, but not merging or fusing the concepts of social identity and identity work. This provides a perspective that conceptualises identity at work as a fluid framework, enabling identity to be explored as both a resource and a struggle within the context of a knowledge intensive organizational setting. The study as a whole provides a contribution to the field of identity and organizations in the sense that it is a multi-level, cross-organizational, empirical study which, through constructing a dialogue between literatures, furthers understanding of the role of identity in a knowledge intensive, rapidly changing, client-dominated, organizational setting. The practical contribution is in the insight provided into how identity is created *and* used to deal

with many of the challenges of this complex workplace setting, including constructing and managing what can be viewed as a paradoxical relationship with the Client.

3.2 Seeing more of the picture

Identity in the workplace should not be understood only in terms of a continuous process or struggle as discursive approaches tend toward, nor only in terms of fixed/stable labels/categories, as more traditional approaches tend toward. Rather, it can be viewed holistically as embedded in both the categories, labels, and relatively stable constructions by which a 'team', or a 'department', or an 'organization' is recognised, and from which individuals may ground and justify their interactions *and* as constituted and reconstituted in the narratives, discourses, and symbolic interactions that people employ to create, shape, change and manage their multiple identities.

It has been argued that, in the organization studied, the narrated, fluid, pluri-vocal (Brown, 2006) aspects of organizational life, and the more structured, hierarchical, rule-bound aspects build upon and feed each other to create 'fluid frameworks of identity'. These frameworks are both created and used by individuals throughout the organization to cope with the complexities and paradox of their working lives. It has been proposed that this integrated approach, in theoretical terms, can be achieved by combining ideas and concepts from both the discursive and social-psychological approaches and that this approach can help to overcome the stereotypical views of organizations and identities as being *either* fairly stable, structured, and machine like, *or* fairly fluid, network-based and organic (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004), and providing a view that identity at work exhibits a multitude of potentially paradoxical characteristics simultaneously.

3.3 Hearing more from the non-managerial individual

This study has paid attention to what employees themselves do in terms of making use of their identities in the workplace. Although there are studies that consider employee responses to managerial attempts to control identity at work (Kunda, 1992), the focus I find missing from the literature is one in which the individual, regardless of seniority

is central. Often in studies of identity at work the focus is on what and how managers do or may do to influence or control the identification processes of employees (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Fiol, 2002). Furthermore, the focus tends to be narrowed to just one organization, or just one level of analysis. This can lead to many aspects of identity being treated as relatively unproblematic. In today's fragmented, ambiguous, rapidly changing, fuzzy 'boundary-ed' organizational worlds, particularly one in which even the most junior employee, due to the nature of the work and the relationship with the client, may be in a position of power regarding identity, more multi-level, cross-organizational studies are needed.

From this perspective, employees are constantly managing their own identities in the workplace. At times this may be in response to managerial influence, however, within the kinds of organizations in which this research is interested, because the employees throughout the organization are in control of many aspects of the client relationship the control and influence over many organizational elements may be mutually created, and not always from the top down. Furthermore, as the tools and 'building blocks' (Fiol, 2002) of identity construction are discursive and symbolic they are subject to change and (re)interpretation. Although managers may have more sway regarding the creation of 'claimed identities' by controlling the official written materials of an organization, it is not possible for any single person or group, regardless of their seniority to predict how employees may respond and interact with the official messages, therefore control over the 'lived identities' within the organization is likely to be dispersed throughout the organization. An integrated approach does not ask 'who wields power over whom?' Rather, it acknowledges that identity may be a struggle and/or a resource for all individuals throughout the organizational hierarchy.

3.4 Understanding more of the process

An integrated approach assumes that the meanings of work-related social identities can be conceptualised as both fixed and mutable, with boundaries that are both strong and permeable. They are relatively fixed in that the organization's socially negotiated structure, such as the teams, departments, and functional divisions, even in rapidly changing organizations, can be well rehearsed, defined and protected by

organizational members. They are also relatively flexible in that the daily interactions and narratives of individuals can (and do) influence the social identities, which may reinforce, but may also breakdown or permeate the boundaries between the identities of groups.

This research has explored identity at work as an emerging pattern. Work-related social identities in these kinds of organizations are seen as the temporary result of identity work, or 'periods of becoming' fraught with struggles and negotiation, which, from time to time, result in consensual identities – or 'moments of being'. If the concept of social identities provides ways to explore moments of 'being', then the concept of identity work provides ways to explore periods of 'becoming'.

Juxtaposing them within the same study extends understanding of the complex process of identity at work. This study brings a complexity and diversity of identity in the context of everyday work. It highlights the moments of being, as well as the periods of becoming, processes which are deeply embedded in the research participants daily work lives. Both aspects of identity, in terms of creating and shifting between multiple identities (identity work/struggle/periods of becoming), and in terms of acting from different identities (social identities/identity as a resource/moments of being) are a crucial part of work life for the research participants who took part in this study. Managing social identities as multiple perspectives in everyday work contexts is integral to being an Agency employee. Managing multiple theoretical perspectives is the role of a researcher attempting to explore the everyday work contexts of contemporary, knowledge intensive organizational settings.

This study has shown that whilst it is of crucial importance to develop a dynamic understanding of identity, it is also important for empirical, grounded studies of identity in the workplace to also notice the outcomes of identity processes because these are part of the way organizational members create and maintain order. These outcomes of identity processes can be thought of as those temporary moments, or pauses, when an individual or group takes stock of who they are, and reflects upon their identity and what it means in terms of a guide for action (Bartunek, 2003) or how it affects ones sensemaking process (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). It is argued that it is possible to view identity as both a process and an outcome, and understanding the

‘becoming’ of identity does not have to be at the expense of the ‘being’ (Beech & Johnson, 2005).

This view, it is argued, is important when conducting grounded, empirical, exploratory studies into identity at work, especially when interested in the day-to-day context of knowledge intensive organizations. This is because it enables the researcher to keep an open mind, and therefore, an open ear and eye, to what is going on in terms of identity in contemporary workplace settings. Thus, from an integrated approach, which provides a balancing perspective, identity is conceptualised as outcome and process, difference and sameness, stability and change, resource and struggle.

3.5 Crossing organizational boundaries

Research has been done into how identity boundaries are maintained between two distinct groups of people who are likely to work for very different organizations (Lilley, 1997). Research has also been carried out into how socially shared identities are created among co-workers within the same organization (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001) and between those in formal collaborations (Beech & Huxham, 2003). An important contribution of this research is to consider the role of identity across organizational boundaries, and to do so within the context of everyday work. One of the key questions this research has raised, to which initial answers have been provided is; What happens when individuals from two organizations with potentially conflicting views engage in frequent, in-depth interactions? In other words, how can we understand a new, or hybrid social identity, built from the day-to-day interactions of a group of people, created across organizational boundaries? The initial foundations for such a proposition have been laid within this research, which suggests this possibility is embedded in the multi-level nature of identity. To be more specific, it is not organizations that become inter-locked with respect to their identities. This shared understanding is created at an inter-organizational *team, department, or individual* level. Small groups and individuals within each organization find ways to generate common, or at least mutually required ground. The relationship may be paradoxical, but at a small group or individual level people interacting can be seen to create a shared in common identity between the two organizations. As with the other

work-related identities considered within this research setting, this identity is evolving and emerging in interactions, but from time to time, the process of becoming is paused and ‘acted from’, as opposed to ‘worked on’. Due to the cyclical nature of the identity process conceptualised using Markova’s (1987) reading of Mead’s (1934) concept of the I and the Me, the ‘acted from’ becomes, in retrospect, the ‘worked on’ once the moment has passed.

SECTION FOUR – EVALUATION

4.1 Evaluating the research

Undertaking a study that pays close attention to how individuals make sense of themselves, those with whom they interact, and their work in a complex organizational context meant I had to gain access to a research site that was complex in terms of the relationships that comprise that setting, and complex in terms of the nature of work carried out there. In many ways a marketing Agency served this purpose very well. There are complex inter-departmental and even inter-team relationships. There is an interesting relationship with the Client personnel, who are frequently ‘back stage’, and although the Client is powerful in the sense that they are one of a few in a very competitive sector, Agency is also powerful in the sense that they play a very important role in communicating to the wider world the image, brand, and reputation of the Client. The work is complex in that it is knowledge intensive, ambiguous and subjective. Furthermore, it relies on a range of people with diverse skills working together to achieve a consistent and coherent message. The people involved must find ways to achieve diversity and consistency of identity, closeness with and distance from the Client. The choice of research setting lined up well with the underlying aim of the research.

The grounded nature of the research, which was achieved through thorough fieldwork and consistently maintained throughout the data analysis ensured an empirically-based study. Letting the data collection be guided by the interactions of the research participants was an effective way to carry out a multi-level, cross organizational study, given that organizational settings are constructed as multi-level and cross-boundary by participants who interactively create them. Overall, the research strategy

can be evaluated in terms of consistency with the following as outlined by (Locke, 2001):

- Observe and understand behaviour from the subject's point of view
- Learn about participant's world
- Learn about participant's interpretation of self
- Learn about the dynamic properties of interaction

These were achieved by adhering to symbolic interactionist methodology and principles. As identified by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003):

‘there is a certain “thinness” to the treatment of identity in much of the literature. In order to understand identity in depth we need to listen carefully to the stories of those we claim to understand and to study their interactions, the discourses and roles they are constituted by or resist – and to do so with sensitivity for context’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003: 1190).

The research in hand has paid close attention to the interactions and the stories of the research participants with an appreciation of the complex intra and inter-organizational context. The stories have been explored and interpreted through this research, and sometimes in those stories the ‘identities as frameworks’ as well as the identity stories themselves, are recognised as important to the participants.

4.2 Evaluating the integrated perspective/contribution

The integrated approach was developed through several rounds of data collection, analysis, and literature reviews. During this iterative process I identified two other studies that exhibit similar characteristics in their assumptions about and approach to the study of identity and organizations. Beech & Huxham (2003) focus on the forces for and against consistency and disruption of identity in collaborative settings. The picture that emerges from their study is one of identities that although are continually shifting (becoming), also become ‘crystallized’ for periods of time (being). Within their research they point out that identities are partly determined by the identities people assign to themselves and others (a framework), and partly determined by actions (fluid). Beech and Huxham’s (2003) focus was on interorganizational

collaborations. They suggest ‘the question for participants in collaborations is how best to engage with the mêlée of identity formation cycles’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 142). They argue ‘that a first step is to recognize them’ (Beech & Huxham, 2003: 142). It is suggested that the study in hand has detected identity formation cycles in a slightly different setting. It has recognised them at multiple levels in a marketing Agency-Client relationship. This connection with and support for an existing study validates the usefulness of the integrated approach and raises the intriguing question, what other kinds inter-organizational relationships give rise to identity formation cycles? This is clearly an area for further research.

Karreman and Alvesson (2004) ‘explore and discuss social identity and identification...in a firm with a strong presence of socio-ideological or normative control, but also with strong bureaucratic features’ (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004: 149). The argument they make is that shifts in the way organizations are understood reflect empirical changes in contemporary organizations. They go on to point at the dynamics between different types of control, usually associated with the different types of organization, building upon and feeding one another, rather than focusing on one or the other or arguing that one replaces the other in contemporary organizations. This example is used as further support that in understanding complex, contemporary organizational life, ‘both/and’ approaches are needed.

SECTION FIVE – FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 Theorising to theory to theorising

Continuing the theme of becoming and being, or creating – creation – creating, it is suggested that the integrated approach proposed and developed within this thesis is positioned within this thesis as being an approach relevant for this kind of study. It is a creation that has resulted from an interaction of data, interpretation, and existing literature that has helped to generate insight within this particular study. It has been used an approach, or lens, through which to view the role of identity in the workplace studied. In other words, as part of its creation it has also been used as resource. In terms of the broader context of the identity and organizations literature, it is of course in a state of becoming. Further work is needed to refine and more fully unpack the

interrelations between the two main concepts. Thus a key opportunity for further research is to work towards developing and testing the integrated approach in further organizational settings.

5.2 Paradox

In the context of this research the theme of paradox has suggested itself several times as a useful way to further what has been learned so far. For example, it might be argued that an advantage of the integrated approach, and what makes it vital for exploring identity in knowledge intensive setting is in the opportunity it affords to explore the paradoxes of identity in the workplace (Fiol, 2002). It has been suggested that characteristics relevant to contemporary, knowledge intensive organizations ‘reveal and intensify paradox’ (Lewis, 2000: 760) and that previous research in this area has ‘examined how contradictions both hamper *and* encourage organizational development’ but ‘few explore them at greater depths’ (Lewis, 2000: 760). Lewis’ (2000) paradox framework may be a way to further develop the integrated perspective proposed in this research by unpacking further the tensions and conflicts inherent in the approach and using these to develop further the insights into organizational complexity and ambiguity. Alternatively, rather than seek to resolve the paradox of fluid frameworks (a pattern that plays out over time), or simultaneously close and distant client relations (separated over time and by department), there may be fruitful research in exploring such paradox as ‘an invitation to act’ (Beech, Burns, Caestecker, MacIntosh & MacLean, 2004).

5.3 ‘Going narrative’: Furthering understanding of inter-organizational relations

An alternative opportunity for further research is to develop some of the areas within the research that were rich in data but lacked development in terms of theory due to time and space constraints. For example, dress has been recognised as an important symbolic resource in identity at work, but remains under researched (Humphreys & Brown 2002a; Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997). Building on the insights generated from this study regarding the complex pattern or interplay of Client-Agency and intra-Agency

relationships, exploring these through the narrative analysis of work wear could provide further insight into this complex, multi-level, cross-organizational area.

SECTION SIX – CONCLUSION

Each of the two main approaches considered within this research provides a different emphasis with respect to the nature of identity. Socio-psychological approaches tend to emphasise a more structured/ordered framework into which people place themselves and others, whereas more discursive approaches tend to emphasise a fluid/emergent narrated view whereby people are seen to be continuously engaging in conversations, and narratives in order to create their identities, which can never be taken for granted. Each has its relative strengths and weaknesses in terms of understanding the role of identity in workplaces. By constructing a way to draw the two approaches together, it has been possible to suggest an integrated approach that enables identity to be seen as comprising elements of *both* stability and order, *and* elements of fluidity and becoming. This balanced perspective, or integrated approach can be used to recognise some of the weaknesses of each theoretical viewpoint, and draw together their strengths to more fully explore the complex role of identity in a complex, knowledge intensive organizational setting.

In other words, there are gains to be had in the field of identity at work by using the concepts of social identity and identity work in the same study. This is because each concept misses a crucial, but different aspect of identity at work. Social identity alone underplays the creative, discursively constituted nature of identity, whereas identity work alone underplays the potential that identity has to guide and justify action. Ultimately, used in isolation from one another, the overall complexity, and potential, for the role of identity at work, can be underemphasized. This thesis has addressed this under-emphasis by bringing balance, comprehensiveness, and complexity to the study of identity at work. The approach proposed has been used within this longitudinal, multi-level, cross-organizational study. This has provided insight into the identity struggles, and identity resources of a group of people within a marketing agency who engage with their fluid frameworks of identity as a way to deal with some of the challenges within the context of their day-to-day work.

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**Appendix 1 – Examples of questions used during the interviews carried out at
the end of phase three**

When you say marketing solution, can you expand a bit more for me?

When you say ‘hopefully challenge briefs’, what does that mean?

Can you expand on client feeding back, why that might be upsetting?

What are the best bits about doing your job?

Can you, in your own words, thoughts and feelings, what is the relationship with the client like?

Thinking about the meetings that you have with the Client, can you describe them?

What would you say that main difficulties are in dealing with the Client?

What are the best bits and worst bits about working with Creative?

Why do you see Creative as the most important?

How do you think you earn the Client’s trust?

Can you put your finger on why you think you are the Client’s closest contact in this team of Agencies?

What characteristics or personal qualities do you think make a good Account Handler?

When you say you’ve got somebody’s hat on, can you describe, can you explain to me what that means?

From your point of view, what have been the highlights of the Auto account?

Can you tell me about your role within the organization?

When you say you work closely with somebody or there’s interaction going on, can you describe the kinds of things that mean you are working closely with somebody?

How does it feel to meet with other Agencies?

What kind of things have you done to learn about Auto?

Can I just check, you said ‘sometimes it feels like a ‘them’ and ‘us’ between Client and Creative, but for you, as an Account Handler, you have to be with both’?

Who gets involved in a breakfast club meeting?

Is 'heads down' negative?

Why does your conscience tell you you should have catch up meetings?

Please can you tell me about your key areas of responsibility?

What do you think needs to be done to keep Account Handlers motivated and enjoying their work?

What does 'quality thinking' mean for an Agency?

What challenges do you believe the organization faces over the next 1-5 years?

What characteristics would you say define the client relationship that you are involved in?

And what factors would you say are required for a good Agency-Client relationship?

What causes that conflict and how does it manifest?

What characteristics would you say define the Agency for you?

Do you feel that the Agency has an identity?

What does this term, client equity mean exactly, within the Agency?

Appendix 2 – A summary of the research participant’s ambivalent views about ‘being regional’

- Difficulty in attracting younger/junior members. This view reflects the perception that younger marketing professionals want to do the ‘London thing’, meaning that they want to spend some time working for a London based agency where the pace of life is presumed to be faster, and the social life attached to the job more vibrant, than in a regional agency.
- Overcoming client perceptions. Client perceptions of regional agencies are that they are softer on ideas, meaning that the client does not believe they are getting the latest thinking in terms of new concepts, and ways of delivering marketing messages, from a regional agency.
- Not being on the ‘client radar’. This refers to when clients are looking for new agencies regional ones are not even considered. In the marketing industry, clients and agencies are often introduced to one another through ‘matchmakers’ who hold rosters of many agencies from which clients select a few to invite to tender for new business. Regional agencies can often be at a disadvantage as they are not included on matchmakers’ rosters.
- Convincing the client that you can be ‘there’ for them. This is seen as a logistical issue. Clients and agencies can spend significant amounts of time at one another’s offices. Furthermore, clients often expect agency employees to attend meetings with senior members of the client organization, or even other agencies, sometimes at short notice. Clients can be concerned that an agency not based in London will have difficulties in attending such meetings.

- A more family-orientated lifestyle. This is perceived as a cause of employees not wanting to join in with 'agency life' i.e. social activities outside work hours. Some employees feel this is a problem as they believe the out of hours activities are a crucial element of agency life.
- Regional agencies attract more experienced personnel. It is felt by some that regional agencies appeal to marketing professionals who are looking for a calmer pace of life *after* they have done the 'London thing'. This means that regional agencies attract more experienced personnel who may be several years into their career.
- Employees working for a regional agency are likely to be more loyal and committed. It is felt by some that regional agencies generate greater levels of loyalty and commitment than London agencies. This is attributed to the fact that the regional agency does not exist in such a competitive job market. Employees are less likely to socialise with other agency workers, thus it is harder to hear about new job opportunities through the grapevine.
- Regional agencies tend to have cheaper overheads. It is widely accepted that the two greatest costs for an agency are their office space and wages. Agencies in London have to pay a large premium for these and inevitably, the client ends up paying more.
- Some clients prefer a regional agency. For some clients a regional agency is preferable because of the various benefits listed above, the more experienced personnel, a different feel and pace to the working life, less changes in the account team personnel and so on. One research participant told me that some clients will opt to use a regional agency because they like the idea of a day out in the country!

